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Temple Israel

Growth and Achievement: *Temple Israel*

1854 — 1954

Edited by Arthur Mann
Foreword by Oscar Handlin

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 6, 1954

Dear Rabbi Gittelsohn:

Please extend my warm congratulations to all members of your congregation on the occasion marking the one hundredth anniversary of Temple Israel of Boston.

The long history of this religious institution is evidence of its success in serving the spiritual needs of the people of Jewish faith in its community. I know, moreover, that the influence of this temple has reached far beyond the boundaries of Greater Boston, and it is my hope that this beneficial influence will continue to exert itself for many more years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dwight D. Eisenhower". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn
Temple Israel
Longwood Avenue and Plymouth Street
Boston 15, Massachusetts

*To the Men, Women, and Children
of Temple Israel*

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Foreword

American religious institutions have not in the past received the serious study they deserve. There are books enough that deal with the careers of the leaders, and there are numerous accounts of theology. But there has been little effort to probe the nature of the social forms that give meaning and order to the faith of the mass of people.

Among the factors that have kept us from understanding more fully this whole area of national experience has been the absence of useful studies on the local level. Every now and then a commemorative occasion has produced a memorial volume, largely self-congratulatory and replete with the names of lay and clerical dignitaries. But rare indeed has been the work that went beyond the personal details to a serious effort at self-comprehension.

Yet self-understanding is precisely what is most

needed. Given the variety of religious sects in the United States, and the diversity of their cultures, it is difficult for outsiders to understand the inner meaning of each of the many faiths to which Americans adhere. They can come to do so only if the communicants themselves acquire the capacity to write about themselves with candor and detachment. As important, the communicants themselves through want of those qualities are often deprived of the means of understanding their own past, and of seeing their own development in the perspective of time.

This congregation has been fortunate in securing for its own celebration the devoted services of a group of historians who have brought to their subject unusual skills and drawn from it a series of valuable conclusions. The writers who have contributed essays to this volume have viewed the history of Temple Israel in the light of a whole pattern of American religious development and at the time have seen this institution within the context of the community in which it was situated. From their study they have contrived a work that will be widely read by Americans, and that should be understood by all the members of the congregation they describe. Those who read this book will know better the meaning of their own affiliation, and the significance of the processes of historic Judaism in which they have been involved for a century.

OSCAR HANDLIN

Editor's Preface

Temple Israel's celebration coincides with the tercentenary of the American Jewish community. Clearly, 1954 is a year for stock-taking. In Boston, where stock-taking is dear to the heart, it is characteristic that New England's oldest reform congregation should want a history of itself. This volume has been prepared to satisfy that want.

Growth and Achievement describes the acculturation of a portion of an ancient people in modern America. Like other immigrants, Jews have acquired new habits, ideas, and occupations without losing a sense of continuity with the folk past. This blend of the old and the new is the product of a free society and of a people who linked their individual futures to the future of America. We have attempted in this volume to sketch the major outline of that process as revealed in the institutional and ideological life of Temple Israel.

In the late nineteenth century the congregation spliced the values that flowed from the new England Renaissance with the ethics of prophetic Judaism. The result was liberal Judaism, and can be measured by the important roles that the rabbis and congregants have played in the preservation and expansion of free society in America. Facing outward, the congregation has yet managed to retain an inner life all its own without violating its commitment to the larger community. The varied activities that have developed at the temple have made life richer for persons who are both and at once Jews and Americans.

The contributors to this volume examined as far as possible materials relevant to their essays. The volume, however, is by no means definitive, and the task remains of writing the full history that New England's oldest Reform congregation merits. In the absence of a formal bibliography, let me note that the sources include the *Minutes* of Temple Israel; newspapers; pamphlets, articles, sermons, and books written by the rabbis; manuscripts and scrapbooks held by the families of Rabbis Solomon Schindler, Charles Fleischer, Joshua Loth Liebman, and Harry Levi; and interviews with congregants of long memory. The footnote, which in this case might distract rather than help, was put in the waste-paper basket.

A number of persons had a hand in the preparation of *Growth and Achievement*. Mr. Joseph H. Cohen, Mr.

Lee M. Friedman, and Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn made the decision to secure the services of the contributors who wrote this volume. Rabbi Gittelsohn was always available to me for cheerful and helpful comment. Miss Fanny Goldstein, Mrs. Claire Schindler Hamburger, Mrs. Mabel Leslie-Fleischer, Mr. Robert Levi, and Dr. Jacob R. Marcus (Chief of the American Jewish Archives) made available relevant manuscripts and newspaper clippings; while Mr. Lewis L. Martinson, Mr. Samuel A. Nemzoff, and Miss Frances Thumim assisted in the location of materials. Dr. Stephen T. Riley of the Massachusetts Historical Society was good enough to provide us with our picture of Boston one hundred years ago. Mr. Abraham S. Burack arranged for the publication of the volume by The Riverside Press, and Riverside's Mr. Howard Bezanson kept his promise to give us a handsome book on a terribly tight schedule. Miss Bernice M. Bianchi, Miss Nancy P. Randall, Miss Bessie R. Berman, and Mrs. Fred Alexander typed the manuscript, while Mrs. Fan Liebman and Mrs. Arthur Mann read proof. I wish, finally, to thank Mr. Robert Levi, Mrs. Fan Liebman, Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, and Dr. John Haynes Holmes, who read Part II and separated error from fact.

ARTHUR MANN



Part One

Early Milieu and Growth



CHAPTER ONE

American Jewry in 1854

I

At first blush, the coincidence of Temple Israel's centennial celebration with American Jewry's tercentennial makes for a deprecatory comparison. Any other year would make sense, some might say, to mark a one hundredth anniversary — but not this year when American Jews are so conscious of their three hundredth anniversary in North America. But we know that the first two and one half centuries of Jewish life in America were a prologue to the third. Temple Israel's life spans the years in which the decisions were made, the patterns laid, which transformed American Jewry from a provincial outpost into the most powerful Jewish community in the world.

For the Jews in this land, as well as for American society in general, the period 1840–1875 was characterized by rapid growth. These were the years in which the Jews of Boston first became numerous enough to found three synagogues, among them Temple Adath Israel. No chain of historical continuity linked Boston's colonial

Jewry to the nineteenth century; and the same was true for many other cities. In 1790, there were perhaps two thousand Jews in America, in 1825 possibly fifteen thousand. Their organization and their lines of communication were simple. It was only through increased immigration, beginning in the 1840's, that a substantial Jewish population came into being. On the eve of the Civil War nearly 150,000 Jews lived in America.

Their presence destroyed the simplicity of an earlier communal pattern. Before 1825, it had been possible to service a community with a single synagogue and with a single charity fund administered by the synagogue; with one religious school, one foster home, one hospital. After 1840, with New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and New Orleans taking the lead, the multifaceted community arose. Between 1840 and 1851, forty-one synagogues were founded. Religious schools proliferated, as did charitable and fraternal organizations, hospitals and foster homes. By the 1850's it was also clear, as reformers and traditionalists disputed over ritual and theology, that there would no longer be a single rabbinical authority. Already the major outlines of modern Jewish life in America were visible.

II

The problems that Jews faced one hundred years ago derived from expansion and were largely internal. There

was a shortage of textbooks for religious schools as well as books for adults. Competent rabbis were hard to come by, and this was as true for existing congregations as it was for new ones. American Jews lacked an organization to supervise the collection of funds for poverty-stricken Jews abroad, and they had no common voice to urge the American government to protest to foreign powers their mistreatment of Jews. As yet no formal union bound the numerous and dispersed Jewish communities in America.

These problems were settled pragmatically, for no preconceived pattern could be imposed on the fluid American Jewish scene. No community like this had existed, in literally complete freedom, where every Jew could go his own way, and where the government did not compel him to support his own communal institutions. In the years 1840–1875, the first truly creative era in American Jewish history, a few rabbis and lay leaders attempted to discover avenues for the enhancement and advancement of Jewish communal life, both local and national. They were particularly concerned to get a congregational union, rabbinical synod, seminary, publication society, religious education union, and centralized fund for overseas charity.

The initiative was seized by two outstanding rabbis, Isaac Leeser of Mikveh Israel Congregation, Philadelphia, and Isaac Mayer Wise of Congregation B'nai Jesurun, Cincinnati. Leeser was the first to see the need

for the unification of American Jewry in answer to the existing chaos, and bombarded his followers with arguments in favor of national organization and service. In 1843, he started the monthly *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, the first enduring national Jewish periodical. He translated the Bible as well as both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic prayer books into English, and published several volumes of sermons. Wise, who left Albany for Cincinnati in 1854, where he shortly was to establish his own weekly journal, *The Israelite*, agreed with Leeser on the necessity for national organization to solve the problems of the day.

But Leeser and Wise, ideologically opposed to one another, were unable to work in concert. And this was unfortunate, for there were laymen who were receptive to the idea of an American Jewish conference (or committee or congress or board or union). Leeser was a Conservative, bound to traditionalist interpretations of Judaism, while Wise was the first American rabbi to speak for Reform, the philosophy which sought to adjust tradition to need.

Together with associates, Leeser attacked as heretical Wise's *History of the Israelitish Nation from Abraham to the Present Time* (1854), the first Jewish history written by an American rabbi. Wise's volume, containing a rationalist interpretation of Biblical events, was offensive to the Conservatives. Dr. Wise "has spoken out so plainly against the inspiration of the Bible and the truth of the

miracles," Leeser wrote, "that no one who believes the ancient method [of interpretation] can be deceived . . . the Bible is either true or not. . . ." Wise responded by attacking Leeser, in the very first issue of the *Israelite*, July 6, 1854, for an unscholarly translation of the Bible. Not until the 1870's did American Jews overcome personal acrimony to organize formally on national lines.

Yet, by 1854, inter-community cooperation was not unusual. The press, in particular, aroused interest in the promotion of benevolent associations, Hebrew education societies, and synagogues. In 1854, the Jews of Savannah contributed one hundred dollars toward the building of Augusta's first synagogue. And in the same year Jews in many cities responded to the appeal of the New Orleans Benevolent Society, which, supporting invalids, widows, orphans, and mendicants, had exhausted its budget on the medical care and burial of more than a hundred Jewish victims of the yellow fever epidemic in the summer of 1854.

Similarly, the publication in 1854 of the will of Judah Touro, New Orleans merchant and philanthropic pioneer, revealed that there was at least an informal union of American Jews. Touro's wealth was almost legendary. His eccentricity hid his true personality, yet his deeds of benevolence were known in many parts of the country. Withal, American Jews were unprepared for his unprecedented will. He bequeathed a half million dollars to dozens of organizations and philanthropies, Catholic,

Protestant, and Jewish. The latter included the majority, if not virtually all, of the synagogues, benevolent societies, hospitals, and educational institutions in the country. He also left money to several rabbis and Palestinian causes. The universal homage paid to Touro's generosity, the non-sectarian character of his philanthropy, and the incalculable assistance which he rendered to weak and fledgling Jewish communal enterprises were of tremendous import for American Jewry.

Touro was the first American Jew to be respected and acclaimed as participant both in general American affairs and in Jewish life. Psychologically, his will helped every Jew to bask in reflected glory, to take courage in the task of being a Jew, to give his little in time and money to causes which were remembered by this man of large wealth. Judah Touro dignified Judaism in America, gave to it some of the mystic appeal which the Bible already had for most American Christians. Touro, without knowing it, helped to make America a warmer home for his fellow Jews, and gave to many of them the inspiration to work with greater piety and zeal in behalf of their faith.

American Jews paid homage to Touro in resolution, memorial meeting, and *Kaddish*. And because of his loyalty to the old Newport Synagogue, in which his father had conducted the ritual as cantor, there was yet another occasion for homage, his funeral in the Newport graveyard on June 6, 1854. Delegates came from

many congregations to participate in the solemn service of burial and farewell.

One delegation arrived too late for the formal meetings and ceremonies prior to the funeral, six delegates from the newest congregation in the country — Temple Israel of Boston. It was pardonable that they were late, but ironic and symbolic, for their congregation might also have been remembered in Judah Touro's will to the sum of five thousand dollars, as was "Hebrew Congregation *Oharbay Shalome* of Boston" (it was spelled that way in the will), had it been organized in time for Judah Touro to know of it. No matter. Temple Israel's delegation, sharing in the outstanding event of American Jewish life in 1854, took an equal position on the American Jewish scene with delegates of congregations one hundred and even two hundred years older.

III

In that year, Temple Israel's services were not Reform. Nor were those of Isaac Wise's synagogue, for despite the emotional and theoretical battle between Wise and Leeser, there was very little difference between the ritual of Reform and Conservative rabbis. Only in Charleston, Baltimore, and New York had Reform congregations with radical leanings been organized. In the years that followed, however, the Reform temple emerged. This

was characterized by the innovation of family pews with men and women sitting together; the creation of a mixed choir to assist or supplant the cantor; the introduction of the organ; the abandonment of male worship with covered head; the introduction of confirmation; the modification of the traditional ritual and the translation of a large part of the service in English; the publication of distinctively Reform prayer books; and the abolition of the celebration of the extra day of the New Year and the festivals.

Theologically, the leaders of Reform were adamantly opposed to praying for the return of the Jewish people to Palestine; but in practice, they were as sympathetic toward helping the poor Jews of Palestine as were the traditionalists. In 1854, for instance, a characteristic appeal for assistance for the inhabitants of the Holy Land was sent to several American rabbis by the distinguished British leader and statesman, Sir Moses Montefiore. Reform congregations joined others to subscribe eight thousand dollars. There was hardly any discussion during the time of what we today know as Zionism, although a Philadelphia Quaker named Warder Cresson became so intrigued by the Judaism of Isaac Leeser that he went to Palestine as a settler and became a convert under the name Michael Boaz Israel. He wrote regular reports on Palestinian happenings for Leeser's *Occident*, including traces of the new "self-help" doctrine which was to become a practical counterpart of political Zionism. In

1854, he won a law suit against his family, which attempted to prove him a lunatic — who but a lunatic, they reasoned, would want to become a Jew?

But prejudice against Jews in 1854 was slight and less significant than acts of friendship and cooperation on the part of non-Jews who were dedicated to interfaith amity. American life was by no means formed; it was fluid, developing. Pioneers were needed in many areas and in many enterprises, and, by no means least, in many aspects of human welfare. Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in exalting the melting pot, merely expressed what so many Americans of good will accepted as a matter of course. In 1854, despite the Know-Nothing movement, the door was open to all peoples who wished to come to America and identify their future with that of the country.

It was characteristic for St. Paul's, an Episcopal Church in Baltimore, to contribute to the 1854 Palestine campaign. In San Francisco, Mayor G. K. Harrison, just before retiring from office, contributed one month's salary to the Jewish Eureka Benevolent Society. Customarily, prominent Christians were invited to Jewish balls and banquets where funds were raised. These Christians spoke appreciatively of Jewish philanthropy and the Americanism of Jews. In 1854, Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan, military hero, former Secretary of War, and Presidential nominee in 1848, wrote the following to the Jewish charities of Philadelphia:

Washington, Jan'y 21, 1854.

Gentlemen:

The necessity of attending to my public duties here deprives me of the pleasure of accepting your invitation to attend the second dinner in aid of Hebrew charities, to be given on the 2d of February next.

I should be much gratified to be present on that occasion, and to participate in the duties of the day. They will form a glorious commentary on our institutions, in their operation; and certainly I should feel myself honored by performing the task you have assigned to me, that of responding to the toast which proclaims our country to be "the stronghold of liberty," and that "her gates shall never be closed to the oppressed of other lands." Never, indeed. Oppression drove our fathers here, and the lesson will not be forgotten by their sons, to the fiftieth and the hundredth generation.

Your community is hallowed by many sacred recollections, by many impressive associations. To your people, in the days of the Prophets and Patriarchs, were committed the oracles of the true and living God, and your separate existence through ages of calamities and persecutions, is one of those perpetual miracles which prove the truth of your history — and that the end is not yet. Driven from your own promised land, Providence has provided you with another, unknown to the host that went forth out of Egypt; not a land of refuge merely, but of enjoyment, the enjoyment of social, political and religious equality; and where, though you do not cease to be children of Israel, you become Americans, proud of their home, and attached by all those ties of gratitude and affection which bind men to their country.

Order, industry, obedience to the law, the performance,

indeed, of all the duties of faithful citizens, have marked your community, and I thank God with you, that you are in the land where all the avenues of distinction and prosperity are equally open to all.

I am, gentlemen, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

LEWIS CASS.

To A. Hart, L. J. Leberman, M. A. Dropsie, Esqs., Committee, &c &c.

Expressions of friendship like Cass' helped immigrant Jews to adjust to life in the United States. In 1854, as in most of the other years of our three centuries, the majority of the Jews were recent immigrants who struggled for a foothold in the New World. Language and livelihood they could attain; fraternal, religious, and philanthropic organization they already had attained; but acculturation they would attain only if non-Jewish fellow Americans accepted them and recognized their common citizenship. Welcome was given to American Jews in 1854.

CHAPTER TWO

1854—Boston and its Jews

I

1854 was, for the twenty-three million people who made up the nation of thirty-one States of the United States, an important and exciting year, a turning point in American history, a year of debate and contest, from which Abraham Lincoln and ultimately a Civil War would come. The country was rapidly expanding westward. The times were prosperous. It had been expected that the Compromise of 1850 would bring political peace by once and for all settling the controversy over slavery, which for so many years had caused sectional strife. The election of Franklin Pierce to the Presidency in 1852 was a sort of middle-of-the-road victory for those who wanted to let things ride in the expectation that time and practical men would work out a plan of national progress which avoided political and sectional conflict.

No sooner had 1854 got under way, when the opening



George M. Cushing, Jr.

Back Bay, Boston, 1850's, showing Beacon Street
(from old photograph)



up and the settlement of Kansas and Nebraska and the passage of Senator Stephen A. Douglas' Popular or Squatter Sovereignty Bill, which nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820 as well as the Compromise of 1850, more than ever made slavery a live and agitating issue. Massachusetts assumed a leading part in the struggle. It became respectable to be an abolitionist. Leading citizens associated to finance the outfitting of free soil farmers to settle Kansas so as to rescue it from slaveholders attempting to make it a slave state. "Bleeding Kansas" was to become one of the foundation stones upon which a Republican party was to emerge.

This was the year when the respectable citizens of Boston, gathering in a mob, assaulted the Court House to rescue Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave who was seized under the Fugitive Slave Act for return to his master. The Massachusetts Legislature almost unanimously passed hostile resolutions against the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. This was followed by a meeting in Worcester of Garrisonian abolitionists to advocate that Massachusetts withdraw from the Union in order to be free from the contagion of association with states where slavery was legal. Certain of the great preachers of Boston who had fought for liberal religious thinking — Theodore Parker, James Freeman Clarke, Octavius Brooks Frothingham — and other leaders of the community, were so preoccupied with the Kansas and the slavery agitation that they had little time to give to merely local affairs. Yankee-

land was moving towards a radical free soil stand, and the irresistible conflict over slavery.

The anti-slavery crusade was but the dramatic expression of the reform impulse that moved a generation. Boston was the center of the reform movements of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Secularized, the Puritan conscience was dedicated to the salvation of society. By 1804, liberal religionists captured Harvard, and by the 1850's the clergymen who really counted were either Unitarians or progressive Congregationalists. These clergymen, together with interested laymen, agitated for equal rights for women and the abolition of war, prison reform and the public school, temperance. So far reaching was the spirit of the "age of newness" that, at Brook Farm, some of Boston's most gifted sons and daughters set up a model community in the hope that others would revolutionize their way of life and follow suit. To Carlyle, Emerson wrote that anyone on the streets of Boston might produce from his pocket a project for a new world.

Material expansion kept pace with expansion in thought. The Back Bay improvements begun in 1849 were being pushed forward, and the South End was developing. By the 1850's, Boston, which earlier had been a commercial and financial center without industry, was industrialized. The city was one of the largest boot and shoe markets in the world, while its railroad builders were leaders in the field. As in the past, Boston money continued to finance enterprises outside the city.

Concurrent with material advancements and reform ferments was a population change of vast importance. Up to the Revolution and down to the 1840's, the Hub did not have a considerable influx of immigrants of non-English stock. Although from the earliest days, French, Irish, Spanish, Jews, and many other people had from time to time made Boston their home, the city remained an Anglo-Saxon, Puritan community. As it grew rich and important as a commercial market, it attracted the youth from rural New England to increase its population, and it remained almost untouched by continental European immigration.

As the fourth decade of the nineteenth century brought the great famine to Ireland, and political unrest and hard times to continental Europe, large numbers of immigrants sought refuge on these shores. In the 1840's, 1,713,251 immigrants came to the United States — a number that exceeded the total number of newcomers who had come in all the years after the Revolution up to 1840. As the fifties began, it was apparent that even this figure would be exceeded. Thus, in 1851, immigration was 379,466; in 1852, 371,603; in 1853, 368,645. For the first time, a significant number of Irish and continental European immigrants were attracted to settle in Boston. Among them were Jews, the Jews who founded the Boston Jewish community.

II

The earliest record of a Jew being in what is now the United States is not in the record of the coming of the twenty-three Jews to New Amsterdam in 1654, but in a record of the Great and General Court of the Province of Massachusetts Bay of 1649. Solomon Franco, a Jew, arriving on a Dutch vessel, proposed to settle in Boston. In order to obviate the danger from having a living Jew in their midst, the Government paid him, out of the Colonial Treasury, to leave the province. This, too, in the face of the fact that the Puritans as well as the Pilgrim fathers, turning with special reverence to the Old Testament for guidance, planned and prayed to establish their colony after the model of ancient Israel. In 1641, they formulated "The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts" after "the modell of the Judiciall laws of Moses." It well may be said that while Jewish ideals were a dominant influence in those early days, there was no welcome for Jews.

Inhabitancy was a privilege to be had only by consent of town authorities, for an inhabitant immediately became invested with rights, responsibilities, and land. Moreover, in Massachusetts, as in the other colonies, the early settlers brought with them from Europe the political dogma and practice that state and church were inseparably united. No one enjoyed political rights unless he was a member of the dominant church. Dissenting

Protestants as well as Jews and Catholics were outsiders. In 1631, the Great and General Court of Massachusetts Bay "ordered that henceforth no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this Commonwealth but such as are members of the churches within the limits of this jurisdiction."

In spite of anti-Jewish restrictions, from 1649 onward there was hardly a time when there were not Jews in Boston. Never very many, none prominent in the community life, and more often only transients, or those who moved on elsewhere when they found no great opportunity here. The family of Moses Michael Hays is significant for their being exceptional. There is a tradition that about the year 1830 some Algerian Jews settled in Boston, but they did not remain.

The 1840's mark the beginning of a Jewish community in Boston. Jews came at a time of economic expansion. New England merchants were sending their merchandise to the new Western cities of Chicago and Cleveland, St. Louis, Savannah, and Memphis, to be distributed through the local territory. To these new trade centers also went the Yankee lad, who previously was initiated in business through peddling. This left a vacuum in New England, which Jewish peddlers filled. Arriving in New York from Germany, Austria, and Poland, young Jews started in American life through itinerant trade. With the passing of the Yankee peddler, they came North, to settle in New England and Boston. Bos-

ton directories reveal that, in addition to peddlers, Jews functioned as tailors, jewellers, watchmakers, furriers, cigarmakers, shoemakers, and provision dealers.

We do not know the precise number of Jews living in Boston in the 1840's. For some, they were terribly inconspicuous. In 1849, the usually observant British Consul at Boston, Thomas C. Gratton, wrote that, "Boston does not, I believe, contain one individual Israclite." Similarly, Mrs. Louisa Crowninshield Bacon, a Boston Brahmin, writing of her youthful days, recalled: "There was also one Jew, a thin old man with a close white beard who wore large silver-boned spectacles. His name was Aaron and he was said to be a very worthy character. I think he worked for some small provision market." In 1849, Temple Ohabei Shalom numbered 120 families, and Chevra Ahabath Achim, one hundred families. The latter congregation was short-lived.

Temple Ohabei Shalom, founded in 1842, was the first Jewish organization established in Boston. It was a modest beginning by a small group of humble men — peddlers, capmakers, clerks, and shopkeepers — who had not, in all probability, been unstirred by the religious revivals which were at the time agitating Boston. They built no synagogue, but held services in a rented "upper room" on Washington Street where, in 1844, the Episcopal City Missionary recorded the presence of forty congregants. In 1844, Boston's Jews established their first burial ground. In 1851, Ohabei Shalom purchased

for \$3,417.23 a plot of land on Warren (now Warrenton) Street for a synagogue. With the help of contributions from their Christian neighbors, a fund of some seven thousand dollars was raised, and Boston's first synagogue was erected and dedicated on March 26, 1852.

What sort of welcome could the Jews expect? The legal disabilities against non-Congregationalists had disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century, and in 1833 church and state were formally severed. But in 1854, the Know-Nothing Party, a nativist movement, was at its height. Massachusetts elected a Know-Nothing governor in that year. Two decades earlier a mob had burned the Charlestown Convent.

It is here that we touch the character of the Know-Nothing prejudice — it was anti-Irish Catholic. By the 1850's, the Irish were sufficiently numerous to threaten, so it was thought, the Yankee way of life. The Brahmin Boston Society for the Prevention of Pauperism complained of a "vast influx of foreign pauperism, ready-made and hatched abroad, combined of the worst and most intractable elements, constituting such a social pest. . . ." Anti-Irish, some Bostonians were also anti-Catholic, as had been their anti-Popery forefathers who, in 1647, had enacted a law: "No Jesuit or spiritual or ecclesiastical person ordained by the Pope or See of Rome shall henceforth come into Massachusetts. Any person not freeing himself of suspicion shall be jailed then banished. If a second time, he shall be put to death."

Important differences separated Irish peasant from Boston Yankee. The latter, in the midst of the great reform movements of the day, believed, in the words of Edward Everett Hale, that "all things are possible to one who believes." The Irish, desperately poor and rudely uprooted from their native land, were fatalists. More than that, they were scornful of Yankee reform notions. They were hostile to liberal religion and the public school; and they sneered at abolitionism as "Niggerology." Unlike Yankee reformers, they were against the revolutions of 1848. Throughout the period they questioned the basic assumption of the liberals that America must sweep away institutions that made for inequality.

In time, Irish Boston and Yankee Boston would learn to live with each other. The Know-Nothing Party disappeared as quickly as it had arrived. The wiser heads noted that there was room for the Irish in an expanding economy. And there were Bostonians who remained faithful to the idea of the melting pot. January 2, 1854, in the year of the Know-Nothing governor, the *Boston Herald* defended the first appointment of "foreigners" to the police force. A Concord philosopher at home in Boston — Ralph Waldo Emerson — wrote: "The energy of the Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes, and of the Africans, and of the Polynesians — will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages. . . ."

It was in this spirit that native Bostonians greeted the appearance of the Jewish community in their midst. All religious Boston, not merely the Jews, hailed the dedication of Temple Ohabei Shalom's synagogue in 1852. The Reverend Cyrus A. Bartol preached to his fashionable West Boston Church: "There is something fine and admirable even in the humble circumstances of such a spectacle. The courageous and cheering rearing, upon a close street, in a low quarter of the city, of that small synagogue — that a few might worship the God of their Fathers, in the way of their Fathers," prompts the question of whether we practice our religion with such earnestness as theirs. Similarly, the Mayor of Boston and "other prominent citizens" attended the dedication of Temple Adath Israel in 1854, whose members had seceded from Ohabei Shalom.

Unfortunately, all early records of Ohabei Shalom and Adath Israel have been lost, so that we cannot tell just what happened to cause a split in Ohabei Shalom and the formation of a new congregation. It is probable that the split derived not from theological differences, but from ethnic conflict between the German and the Polish elements, each insisting on leadership and control of synagogue affairs. A newspaper report of the dedication of the new synagogue on Pleasant Street supports this explanation. The *Daily Evening Traveler* noted that the nearly sixty congregants were mostly "seceders from the first Jewish Synagogue established in this city, in which

they say the Polish Jews (whose ceremonies are somewhat different from theirs) obtained the preponderance."

III

Temple Israel was founded when Boston led the way in the New England Renaissance. The period was characterized by growth, experimentation, and discovery, by the creation of a liberal literature, liberal religions, and liberal institutions. It was foremost a period of democratic aspiration in which reformers succeeded in extending rights and privileges to disadvantaged classes. Contemporaries called their age the "age of newness," for they were less concerned to obey than to transcend the past.

The secession of 1854 from Ohabei Shalom, although it did not lead immediately to Reform ritual and theology, was an altogether characteristic expression of the times. It was also prophetic. A feeble but bold infant undertook, with abiding faith, to exercise the American right to worship God according to its religious conscience. The men of '54, in founding Temple Israel, now the second oldest existing congregation in Massachusetts, prepared the way for the creation of liberal, American Judaism. That Judaism preserves ancient idealism and truth unfettered by outworn or transitory ritual — a living religion for free Americans.

CHAPTER THREE

Congregational Life: 1854—1954

I

In 1854, Adath Israel counted twenty-five members; in 1954, 1472 were on its rolls. The intervening century tells an interesting tale.

Although the names of the members — Ehrlich, Hyne-
man, Nordenschild, Strauss, Wolf, Bendix, Morse, Des-
sauer, Dreyfuss, Bacharach, Herkules, — suggests a gen-
erous preponderance of *Deitchuks*, Adath Israel com-
prised a mixed multitude in its early years. A membership
list for 1864 documents the tradition that Algerian or
North African Jews had settled in New England's lead-
ing city. Isaac Edrehi and Joseph Almosnino were clearly
of the Sephardic tribe. It seems likely that Isaac Edrehi
was related to Israel Edrehi, prototype of the Spanish
traveller in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Tales of A
Wayside Inn*. In 1861, a Dr. Delbange lectured at the
synagogue, for which he received the somewhat reluctant
fee of three dollars. Jacob Norton, listed in the *Boston*

Directory as a “furrier and presser of straw hats” and an avid student of masonic history, and William Goldsmith, “jeweler and optician,” both charter members of Adath Israel, each claimed to be the first of the sons of Jacob to arrive in Boston, in 1837. Norton came from Posen, German Poland, by way of England, Goldsmith, directly from the kingdom of Bavaria.

Seemingly, the founders of Adath Israel were among the more prosperous of Boston’s Jews. It was no light matter or petty generosity to abandon the newly constructed Ohabei Shalom building, the cemetery and its privileges, and Judah Touro’s pending legacy of five thousand dollars (Touro died in New Orleans in 1854; his bequest was apparently contested but in vain). Yet the moral triumph belonged to the secedents. They retained the *Sefer Torah*, a gift of Mrs. Charles Hyne-man, the *shofar*, and the congregation’s small account book. This was the very *shofar*, originally purchased for ten dollars and still in the possession of the congregation, to which Rabbi Solomon Schindler later referred in his tribute to Jacob R. Morse:

Our young friend, . . . a virtuoso on the cornet, understands how to draw tones from the instrument which would astonish our ancestors, and when the day will ever dawn on which the great trumpet will be sounded, he will have the best chance of being elected to the glorious position of jubilee cornetist.

The dedication of the new synagogue building on September 15, 1854, the eve of the High Holidays, caught the attention of Hub newspaperdom. Reported *The Boston Traveler*:

Yesterday afternoon a small but very neat looking church or synagogue, erected by Messrs. Powell and McNutt for the German Jews in Pleasant Street near Marion Street . . . was duly consecrated according to the peculiar and interesting ceremonies of that remarkable nation. The church sits a little back from the street and is capable of accommodating some two hundred persons. It is so constructed that the worshipper sits facing toward the East, the direction of Jerusalem. The females are seated in a gallery surrounding three sides of the church, being scrupulously separated from the males. On both sides of the only aisle are lamps which are kept burning during the service. The singers stand in front of the minister with their hats on, and neither the minister nor the congregation are uncovered during the ceremonies.

The synagogue was described as being crowded. Present were "a mayor" and other prominent citizens. The dedication services began with the singing of the psalm, "Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates." Mr. Moses Ehrlich, first president of Ohabei Shalom and the president of the new congregation, opened the doors of the ark containing the sacred scrolls. A procession, led by Moses Ehrlich, Rabbi Joseph Sachs, and Rabbi Max Lilienthal of New York, then advanced down the single aisle bearing the Scrolls of the Law, as the choir sang "How

beautiful are Thy Tents, O Jacob." The choir followed with "Hear O Israel," and the scrolls were placed in the ark. Dr. Lilienthal then recited a prayer followed by a sermon "spoken in broken English but fully understood." Rabbi Sachs closed the services by pronouncing a benediction in German.

The cemetery was for a long time "the most important adjunct of the congregation." Their full youthful energies devoted to the acquisition of a firm economic foothold in the new land, immigrants inevitably neglected the amenities of social intercourse and the joys of religious fellowship. But death was a more insistent creditor. In 1860, within a year after the purchase of land for a cemetery in Wakefield, the congregation, which had dwindled to seventeen members, swelled to fifty. That year Joseph Rosenfeld, aged seventeen, became the first to be interred in the new burial ground. Congregational records reveal that, in a less medically advanced age, a ruthlessly high mortality incidence prevailed among children.

The fiscal affairs of the congregation, as conveyed in the *Minutes* of the early years, breathe an air of order, moderation, and prudence. Many months were to elapse between the recommendation urging the purchase of new curtains and appropriation of the requisite sum of fifty dollars. The donation of *shulchen* covers and *chupah* dress covers by the Phillips and Meinrath families respectively added appreciably to

Adath Israel's reserves of sacred linen. "Green trees" decorated the synagogue on *Shavuot* but the committee did not indulge this enthusiasm beyond the expenditure of five dollars. The expenses for the special services commemorating the passing of Abraham Lincoln in April, 1865, were itemized as follows: ten dollars for advertising services in the Boston *Herald* and *Journal*; \$13.75 for thirty yards of "cottons" for draping the synagogue, draping flag, and portrait; and three dollars for decorating expenses.

The close double-entry bookkeeping of the early years (the funds in the Adath Israel treasury sank to a slim \$5.25 in 1862) of necessity cast the rabbinic office in a pallid light. Versatility rather than incandescent eloquence or erudite learning was the prime requisite for filling the roles of reader, teacher, *shohet*, and secretary to the Board of Trustees. The annual compensation to Rabbi Shoninger for this multiple role rose from a scant two hundred dollars in 1856 to four hundred fifty dollars in 1862 to eight hundred fifty dollars in 1868; a forty dollar bonus was attached for services as secretary. The more imposing credentials of Rabbi Solomon Schindler merited a more respectable salary of fifteen hundred dollars in 1874.

II

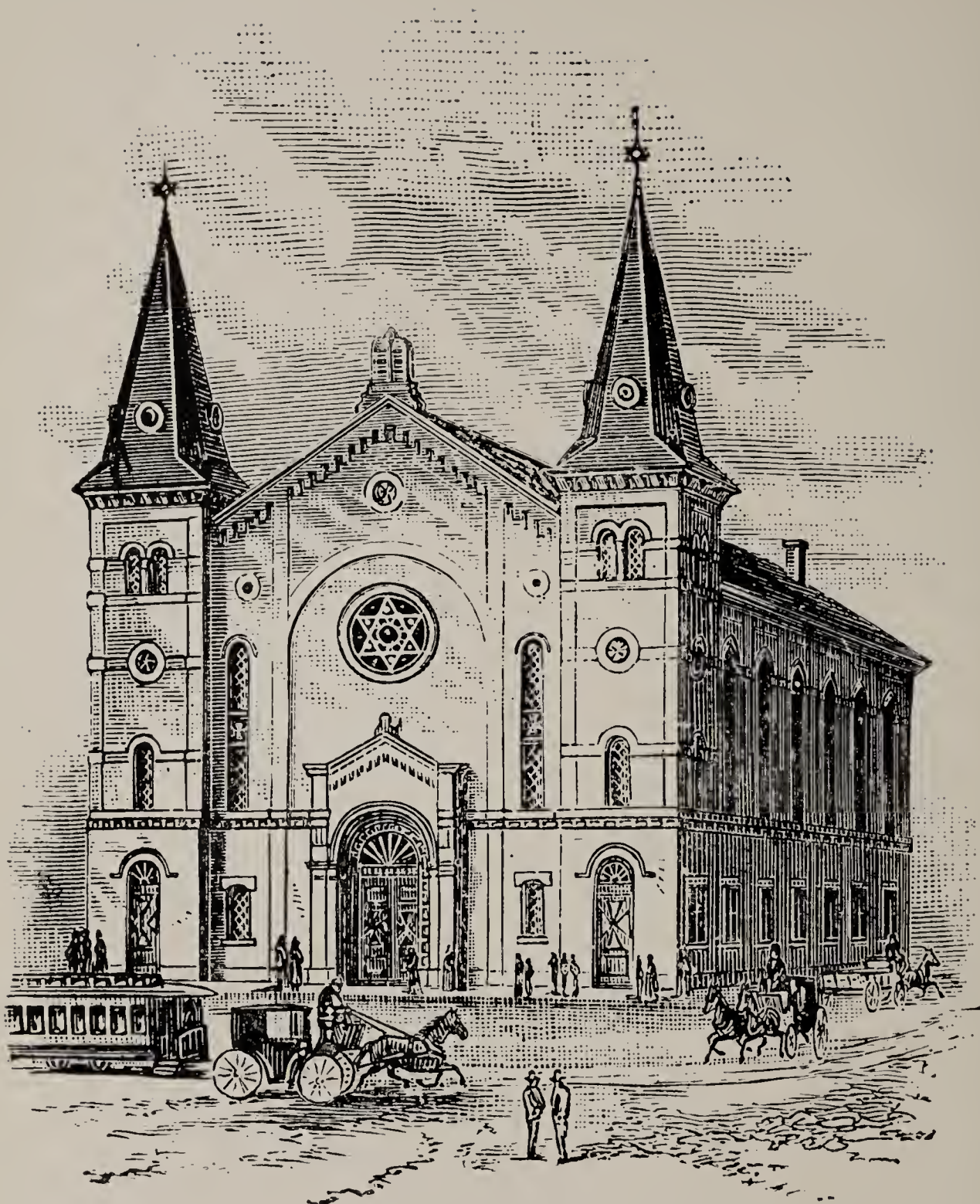
For many years the congregation was composed almost wholly of shopkeepers. At first the proportion of

peddlers was high. But very soon, itinerant trade led to more lucrative and respectable highways of commerce. The building of the synagogue in 1854 already gave evidence of more extensive mercantile pursuits. Largely wholesalers and retailers of clothing, shoes, dry goods, trimmings, cigars, jewelry, watches, and optical goods, there were also some tailors and grocers among them. By the 1870's and 1880's many had become solidly rooted in the Yankee business community, although as yet only the Hecht family had settled in the fashionable Back Bay.

"Enterprise and push," the secret of Ferdinand Abraham's proficiency, were among the ingredients contributing to mercantile success. Edward S. Goulston, tobacconist, the brothers Peavy, wholesale clothiers, Jacob Hecht (Boston's Jacob Schiff) and his brothers, financiers, and Abraham Shuman of "Shuman's corner" (Washington and Summer Streets), department store merchant, were especially prominent. The Morse brothers, Leopold and Godfrey, were the first to enter politics. Leopold Morse was elected to Congress in 1876 as a Democrat from a predominantly Republican district. Godfrey Morse, the first Jew born in Boston to be graduated from Harvard College, was a member of the School Committee and President of the Boston Common Council in 1883.

The changed economic and social status of Temple Israel's members and the appearance of the second gen-





Temple Israel, Columbus Avenue and Northampton Street

eration led to changes in the conduct of services, which had been traditional until the 1870's. Certain of the congregants wanted an American service, but the call for Reform was by no means unanimous. Rabbi Solomon Schindler's introduction of family pew, organ, choir, and new prayer book, drove fifteen of the congregation's forty members to resign. Schindler, however, proved effective in recruiting reinforcements among the unaffiliated and among the newcomers from other cities who had been attracted to Boston in the post-Civil War years.

Adath Israel, soon to be known as Temple Adath Israel, now found the narrow, wooden, yellow-painted building on Pleasant Street unworthy of the aspirations of its members. In 1885, a new structure was completed on the corner of Columbus Avenue and Northampton Street, an attractive section of the South End. Romanesque in style and similar to Richardson's Trinity Church, the exterior of the building was made of Philadelphian brick with brownstone and terra cotta trimmings. Built at a total cost of fifty thousand dollars — the organ alone was valued at 7400 dollars — it was a long stride from the simple four thousand dollar frame structure on an unfrequented by-street. The Reverend Dr. Gustav Gottheil, Rabbi of Temple Emanu-El of New York, delivered the keynote address at the laying of the cornerstone. Chosen by Emanu-El for his masterful command of the English language, his lecture

perhaps gave impetus to the adoption of the English sermon the following year (the congregational *Minutes*, however, were taken down in English as early as 1876).

In the early years, charitable activities were circumscribed by the relatively small demands made upon the congregation by its own members. When during the Civil War, the United Hebrew Benevolent Society was formed to alleviate the economic distress of the poorest among Boston's sixteen hundred Jews, it was natural that it should originate in the Pleasant Street synagogue of its founder, Jacob Hecht. Calls for relief were also heard from distant parts, though it must be said, often without response. In October, 1865, a dispatch arrived from Jerusalem detailing the misery wrought by an epidemic of cholera and famine. In 1866, the congregation called a special meeting in response to a report that twenty-two shipwrecked co-religionists had been landed in Boston and were in need of aid.

Although Lina Hecht, better known as "Aunt Lina," organized the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Circle in 1878 to supply the poor with clothing and blankets, it was not until the onset of the mass migration of the 1880's that the charitable resources of well-to-do Jews were extended. Then Adath Israel led Boston Jewry in practical religion. Edward Goulston, ex-President of the synagogue, expressed the sentiments of the older established residents upon the dedication of the Hebrew Sheltering Home in 1892.

We have to take care of the thousands coming to our shore. We must help them to become good citizens, so we may find among them a Morse, who was an honor to this day as its Congressman, and Hechts, Shumans, and hundreds of others who are leaders among Boston's great merchants. We must certainly treat the immigrants with kindness and toleration. The Christians of this land must exercise toleration toward them, and not believe they are bad because they have been driven from their homes. We must help them to become respected and reputable citizens of this city.

Special-purpose charitable organizations, like the Hebrew Sheltering Home, soon flourished with "Aunt Lina" at the helm. Mrs. Hecht founded the Hebrew Industrial School in 1889, precursor of the Hecht Neighborhood House, to teach immigrant girls to cook and to sew, and to give them religious instruction. "Country Camp" for girls and women followed. The Hebrew Free Burial Society and the Free Employment Bureau of the Baron De Hirsch Committee began to function. In 1895, the Federation of Jewish Charities, the first of its kind in the country, was formed to coordinate the activities of the separate Jewish charitable societies and to regulate the soliciting of funds. The Federation, later known as the Association of Jewish Philanthropies, was eventually to include all Jewish cultural, educational, and social service agencies and institutions.

Years of growth and preparation finally culminated in

1907 in the completion of the Commonwealth Avenue building, effusively hailed by a Boston paper as "BUILT AFTER THE STYLE OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE." The modern Moorish-style tabernacle, constructed of blemished white marble, was originally to have been built in brick. However, Coolidge and Walker, the architects of Temple Israel, were also the architects of the Harvard Medical School. They were able to take advantage of an opportunity to acquire the handsome but blemished white marble from the Harvard Medical School, which had ordered but could not use it.

The dedication ceremonies were impressive. History and prophecy crowded the scene. Down the center aisle strode "the grand old man of Boston," the octogenarian Edward Everett Hale, leaning upon the arm of Lee M. Friedman, a rising young attorney. Alongside Rabbi Charles Fleischer stood his predecessors, Rabbis Shoninger and Schindler. The eloquent and leonine guest speaker, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, founder of the Free Synagogue in New York in 1906 and an early Zionist, evoked a spontaneous ovation. He sounded a fitting note in Yankeedom: "The Pilgrim fathers were Israel incarnated, Maccabeans of the seventeenth century. They stood for the eternal verities of the Jewish faith." The sons of old Israel appreciated the allusion to their place in New England as the "new Israel."

III

The remarkable expansion of Temple Israel in the last half century gradually transformed a parochial chapel into a communal cathedral encompassing a broad range of interests and sentiments and a diversity of traditions. By the 1890's, the temple already drew its members from all the older Jewish families. The earlier skirmishes of rival orthodoxies had been blotted out by Reform, and American sons were unaware and uninterested in the feuds of the fathers. With the coming of Rabbi Harry Levi in 1911, children of newer immigrants were attracted to the temple in growing numbers. They, along with the workings of time, were to modify its features.

A membership of ninety-one in 1888 grew to an unimpressive one hundred fifty at the time of the opening of the one thousand seat temple in 1907. By 1917, membership reached three hundred eighty. In 1929, one year after the completion of the Meeting House in the Riverway, membership rose to 734, until 1941, the highest total in the congregation's history. In 1954, the membership of nearly fifteen hundred stood at a figure nearly eleven times that of 1907. School registration, which had continually lagged far behind membership, almost equalled it in 1954, a promising harbinger for the future.

Rabbi Levi's pastorate, which "put us at the head of all things Jewish," marked a turning point for the con-

gregation. At the ultimate limits of "Americanization" and universalism, Temple Israel embarked upon a reappraisal of values. Perhaps this trend was best summarized by Fanny Barnett Linsky in a play dramatizing the history of the congregation on its eightieth anniversary. The earlier epochs of "faith" (Shoninger), "truth" (Schindler), and "beauty" (Fleischer) gave way to a period of "kindness" (Levi), even we may add of *rachmones*. Confidence and optimism were not abandoned but were merged with a deeper sense of reality as the tragedy of two world wars and their aftermaths gripped the world. Gradually, over the coming decades, as the membership was augmented, the nature of this process became discernible. The synagogue qua pulpit was transformed into the synagogue qua institution. A multiform Judaism and Americanism evolved and intermeshed in a complex twentieth century.

Progress and tradition moved side by side in the temple's calendar. In 1912, Saturday services were restored. But Sunday services also continued. 1913 saw the successful inauguration of the congregational *seder* on the Passover, quite unusual as yet in Reform temples. How much closer was Rabbi Levi to the emotional and religious needs of his congregation than was his predecessor! The 1920's saw the realization of earlier tendencies as well. In 1922, assigned pews were abolished, driving the cash nexus out of the temple. Finally, decades of mounting feminine activity was officially recog-

nized. In 1924, for the first time in the history of the congregation, two women, Mrs. Edward S. Goulston, Sr. and Mrs. Harry Liebmann, were elected to the Board of Trustees; and in the same year, Miss Eva Leon occupied the pulpit. The tasks of the rabbinate had so vastly expanded that in 1923 an assistant rabbi was appointed to aid Rabbi Levi in his crowded round of pastoral duties.

Rabbi Levi's term in office was crowned by a harvest of interfaith activities. The exchange of pulpits, the Union Thanksgiving Service under the auspices of the Greater Boston Federation of Churches (initiated in 1923 upon Levi's suggestion), the Temple Forum, conferences, symposia, and the popular radio broadcasts — all flourished. At the same time, the rabbi gave generous recognition to the moral and spiritual values embodied in an already ebbing Yiddish literature. The Little Theater group, organized by Rabbi Levi in 1929, opened its dramatic career with a series of one act plays by Isaac Loeb Peretz and Sholem Aleichem, classic Yiddish writers. Sholem Asch, Abraham Reisen, Yehoash, and Marc Arnstein were also performed.

These dramatic presentations were only a part of a larger, vigorous adult education program. Beginning with the Temple Forum series some three and one half decades ago, an active Brotherhood and Sisterhood have encouraged forums, panels, lectures, and book discussion groups on a spectrum of topics. Present congre-

gants well remember the impressive lectures of Salo Baron, Jacob Marcus, Cecil Roth, and Maurice Samuel, as well as the musical treats provided by Boris Godlovsky. The artistic and intellectual fare throughout the year has enriched, as it has moralized and personalized, aspects of history and human achievement.

Jewish education for youngsters showed signs of a growing vitality even earlier. Before 1912, Jewish education had been one continual lamentation. "We have the same thing all the time; we begin with Abraham and go as far as Moses." Kindly, well-meaning, unpaid volunteers struggled blindly with students through thickets of ungraded subject matter. Uninterested youngsters were barely held in leash to Sunday morning's close.

Upon the insistence of Lee M. Friedman, and with the cooperation of the Board of Trustees and the newly selected Rabbi Levi, school, teachers, and curriculum were professionalized. Instructors were selected from among the ablest in Boston's public school system. Temple Israel's religious school became the first in the country to compensate Sunday school teachers on a professional basis. It was the first to demand from them rigorous teaching standards, a well-defined curriculum, and strict discipline in classes. Religious subjects were to exact the same attention, interest, and work as secular counterparts. Every effort was made to impress pupils with the value of their instruction. The response was

immediate. To satisfy the demand, two sessions were needed on Sunday, morning and afternoon. Membership was stimulated as youngsters clamored to attend the school. Soon New York's Temple Emanu-El emulated Temple Israel. Others followed.

The last decade and a half has seen even further change. Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman came to Temple Israel to fill out the mission of his predecessor. The restoration of *Shabbos* and the *Bar Mitzvah* and the support of the rise of Israel from the ashes of history symbolized Liebman's deeper sense of urgency — the need to re-educate for Judaism. In this process, he and his congregation became nationally renowned. Rabbi Abraham Klausner, his successor, continued his work. Between 1942 and 1954, school enrollment rose from 412 to 1156. Growth required the use of Temple vestry classrooms on Sundays and sessions at the Meeting House on Saturdays and Sundays. The modernization of methods in Hebrew and religious instruction, the rise of the Zionist spirit, and the availability of professionally trained teachers created a receptive climate.

Energies formerly consecrated to "Americanization" now turned inward. In 1943, an audio-visual aid department under the direction of qualified specialists was introduced. In 1945, a twice-weekly Hebrew school was inaugurated, which stresses reading, writing, and conversation; *Bar Mitzvah* preparation, songs, and prayers. Hebrew, as a medium of understanding between the

United States and Israel, has been given the study and attention omitted by an earlier generation. In 1945, the educational period was extended by the addition of a two year post-confirmation course. With the introduction of a kindergarten in 1950, a clearly defined curriculum reached across the whole educational gamut.

Equally rich has been the extra-curricular program. Arts and crafts and dramatics have been popular. Assemblies solemnizing Jewish holidays and other special events are held regularly. A discussion period with the rabbi, "*Shabbos* with the Rabbi," has become the central feature of the Sabbath. Children's model Passover *Sedorim*, a *Purim* carnival, and an annual marionette show on one of the Jewish holidays rounds out the child's annual voyage through Judaism. Remarkable has been the achievement of the *Torchbearer Yearbook*, first published in 1947. Each year one of the editors has become editor-in-chief of the local high school paper. In 1953, the *Torchbearer* was entered for the first time in the Columbia Scholastic Press Association Contest and was awarded first prize.

The staff of six teachers engaged on an experimental basis in 1912 now numbers forty-five. They supply the leadership for summer camping, youth work, and Jewish organizations and projects. The PTA, organized in 1928, is allied to the school. The PTA has sponsored and supplemented extra-curricular activities. It has played the role of *shadchan* between school and home, enlightening each as to the responsibilities of the other.



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The Commitment to Education

IV

At midcentury, none can doubt that Judaism and Americanism are well joined. The religious commitment to education is one expression of this fusion, and the Judaism of Rabbis Liebman, Klausner, and Gittelsohn is another. The three rabbis supported the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. Rabbi Liebman defended the Jewish Community Center. Rabbi Gittelsohn, as an editor of *The Reconstructionist*, is identified with the idea that Jews are a people as well as a religious group. For Roland B. Gittelsohn, who served as chaplain with the famed Fifth Marine Division that took Iwo Jima in World War II, this is meaningful Judaism in a land of many peoples.

The scions of the Jews of the North End, who were described in 1892 as “sober, industrious, and law-abiding,” have become less self-conscious and more expressive both in their Judaism and in their Americanism. The members of Temple Israel include eminent physicians and judges, leading merchants, manufacturers and attorneys, and many men of science and learning from Boston’s leading cultural and scientific centers. One member is President of Harvard’s Board of Overseers, another is a Pulitzer Prize winning historian and Harvard professor of American history. Many are active in public affairs. Public service and personal achievement are a measure of the journey from the small frame build-

ing on Pleasant Street, to the brick structure on Columbus Avenue, to the marble temple on Commonwealth Avenue, to the dignified Meeting House in the Riverway. The achievement of Temple Israel has been the achievement of America. So its future is the American future.

Part Two

The Making of a Reform
Pulpit





Solomon Schindler



Joseph Sachs



Joseph Shoninger

CHAPTER FOUR

Solomon Schindler: German Rebel

I

In the beginning there was no Reform. Joseph Sachs (1854–1856) and Joseph Shoninger (1856–1874), the first spiritual leaders of Temple Adath Israel, were rabbis of an Orthodox *shul*. Such differences as existed between Temple Ohabei Shalom and Temple Israel were differences over language and minor details in ritual, not over point of view. Central to the thinking of Temple Israel was the belief that the Jews were a unique and separate people to whom God had chosen to reveal His word through Moses. Gentiles were pagans, or at best, inferior religionists with whom God had not made a covenant. As of old, women sat in the balcony of Temple Israel, men worshipped with covered head and *tallith*, and one kept the Hebrew Sabbath.

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The ritual was in Hebrew, the vernacular in German. As yet there was no sermon, and one prayed for a Messiah descended from David's line to restore Israel to Palestine. The Judaism of Temple Israel — ethnocentric, foreign-speaking, an island in non-Jewish Boston — had yet to come to terms with the Enlightenment.

The impetus for reformation came from a handful of German-born merchants. These merchants, of Orthodox background, were successful men who aspired to the manners and outlook of native Bostonians. They wanted to acquire the Boston speech, the Boston dress, the Boston religion: they wanted to be like unto others. More than that, they feared that their American children would embrace Christianity if the *shul* were not Americanized. This fear was widespread. Unless Judaism assimilates the American way, the *American Israelite* warned, we "will have no Jews in this country in less than half a century." Joseph Shoninger, who was not a rabbi but a teacher and a *chazan*, could not formulize Temple Israel's yearning for Americanization. This task fell to a rebel who fled Germany at the same time that Adath Israel thought to discard Orthodoxy.

Solomon Schindler was born in Niesse, Silesia, October 24, 1842. As the eldest son of an Orthodox rabbi he was obliged to follow his father's calling. Accordingly, he studied the Talmud with his learned parent and at the age of thirteen was sent to Breslau to enroll both at the rabbinical school and the gymnasium. But young Schin-

dler did not want to be a rabbi. He objected to Orthodoxy, could not accept the Bible literally, and wanted a career outside the synagogue. After two years he gave up his religious studies, and upon finishing his course at the gymnasium, obtained a degree at a normal school and settled down as a teacher. In 1866, he married Henrietta Schultz, a pious, middle-class Jewish girl from Westphalia, who soon bore him three sons, Otto, Paul, and William. The Franco-Prussian War uprooted the Schindlers. An ardent German nationalist, but a liberal spirit, Solomon objected to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and "delivered a scathing and denunciatory speech against Bismarck" on the very day that the triumphant Prussian armies returned to Berlin. For this speech he had to flee from his native land.

Schindler arrived penniless in New York in 1871 with his wife and three children. Too proud to ask assistance from his spouse's wealthy relatives in New York and El Paso, Solomon fed his family by peddling shoelaces. Within several months poverty in America accomplished what custom and training had failed to do in Germany; it forced the rabbi's son to become a rabbi. Hard-up and discouraged, Schindler grabbed at the opportunity to become the leader of a small Orthodox synagogue in Hoboken, New Jersey, and remained there for three years.

In 1874, Temple Adath Israel, wishing to Americanize its ritual, advertised for a minister in a newspaper

that Schindler chanced to read. He came to Boston, preached a sermon in competition with others, convinced the congregation that he was the man for the job, and was engaged as "Reader, Teacher and Preacher . . . with a yearly salary of \$1,500." As head of Temple Israel, the German rebel pursued his early ambition for a secular career outside the ghetto. The synagogue, which in the villages of Central and Eastern Europe had been simply a prayer house without a minister (the rabbi was a state official of the community), was in the process of becoming a Jewish church complete with pastor and pulpit. The ex-school teacher perceived that his people wished to discard embarrassing alien customs so as to end the *apartheid* that had cursed Israel through the centuries. In twenty years Temple Israel shed these customs to become New England's first Reform Jewish synagogue. However, Schindler's radicalism went beyond the modest aspiration of his people for respectability, and isolated, he left the Temple and Judaism for the religion of social reform as propagated by Edward Bellamy.

Throughout his tenure at Temple Israel, Schindler felt more at home with non-Jews than with Jews. The former were of a special kind, the rebels who had liberated themselves from the values of their parents — Schindler's kind. He was attracted to the Free Religionists, as they were to him; both Jew and Calvinist were attacking a cosmology that rested on the literalism of the Old Testament. With Hamlin Garland, who fled

the intellectually infertile life of the prairies, Schindler researched the unseen spiritual world for the American Psychical Society, a fad for the intelligentsia of that day. Benjamin Flower, who travelled from fundamentalism to the Social Gospel, welcomed the rabbi to the *Arena* crowd, the apostles of newness; and the Nationalists considered it a triumph when New England's first Reform rabbi joined their ranks to translate Edward Belamy's *Looking Backward* into German, and write his own sequel (in English) to that novel. Schindler's closest friend was Minot J. Savage. The first American clergyman to reconcile Christianity and Darwinism, Savage, as his autobiographical novel revealed, went through a gruelling emotional experience before he could throw off the fire and brimstone orthodoxy of his boyhood. In the twentieth century Minot J. Savage would lay the foundation for the Community Church of New York.

Mixing easily with humane and literary Boston, Solomon Schindler was a bridge between the Jewish middle classes and their non-Jewish neighbors. When he brought out an *Illustrated Hebrew Almanac for the Year 5641*, his good friend John Boyle O'Reilly gladly contributed a poem to it. When Boston wanted a representative Jewish opinion, it went to Temple Israel's rabbi. The leading journals published his opinions on education, immigration, racial relations; and the lecture halls often called upon him. Schindler explained Christianity to his congregation and expounded Judaism to

interested Christians. By the middle of the 1880's there were as many non-Jews as Jews who flocked to his sermons at Temple Israel. So well did Solomon Schindler fit that Boston took pride in the fact that he was the first person in the city's history to be nominated by both political parties for the School Committee.

II

Sensitive to the possibility of a rapprochement between liberal Christians and Jews, Solomon Schindler devoted his energies "to educate the Jew for his position as a citizen in the community. . . ." The men who engaged him as rabbi wanted, at the outset, little else than to make their services like the dignified Protestant mode of worship. But Temple Israel's congregation did not know what measures to take or how far to go. The rabbi capitalized on this yearning for an Americanized Judaism. By destroying the old forms and preaching a theology of humanitarianism, he sought to bring an ancient faith "abreast with the time and to win for it the respect of the Gentile world."

The first reforms exploded like a bombshell. When Schindler introduced the family pew, choir, organ, vernacular prayer book, and male worship without hats, fifteen of his congregation of forty withdrew in protest against what seemed to them brazen steps toward Christianity. Schindler did not mind. These measures were cal-

culated to attract the assimilationists among the younger and well-to-do Jews who could not bring themselves to belong to any of the Boston synagogues. The calculation proved correct. By the middle of the 1880's, Temple Israel increased its numbers three-fold to include "100 of the richest and most influential Hebrews in the city," among them Congressman Leopold Morse.

In 1885, the congregation moved from modest quarters in downtown Boston into a newly built temple in a still fashionable part of the South End. At the dedication ceremony, there were addresses by the Reverends Minot J. Savage, Brooke Herford, Edward Everett Hale, and Phillips Brooks. Once in the new building, Solomon Schindler persuaded his flock to take "the so much dreaded step of . . . Sunday services" on the grounds that the business obligations of the men made it impossible to observe the Saturday Sabbath. In a decade, the rabbi achieved his purpose of making the "Jew like the Gentile . . . in ceremonials. . . ."

Worshipping like the Unitarians whom Schindler admired, Boston's Reform Jews were still in need of a modern theology. They went to Jewish church on Sunday and prayed without hats, but as yet they had not formally given up the idea that Israel was God's chosen, that the Messiah would come one day, and that Gentiles were pagans or worse. Further, there was still the Jewish as against the Christian conception of Jesus. Wishing to minimize theological as well as ritualistic dif-

ferences between Jew and non-Jew, Schindler created a synthesis not unlike that of a James Freeman Clarke or Minot J. Savage. Happily, the climate of the then contemporary science enabled him to embrace modernism. In particular, he made Judaism come to terms with the study of comparative religion, Biblical criticism, and the evolutionary hypothesis.

The rabbi of Temple Israel knew that the spotlight was on him and that he had a large and sympathetic audience. His first series of sermons, *Messianic Expectations and Modern Judaism* (1885), were delivered in the temple to a numerous throng of which, Minot J. Savage wrote, "more than half . . . was Christian. . . ." What Bostonians could not hear they could read in the daily and Sunday papers. So keen was the curiosity in what Schindler had to say that one Boston newspaper drummed up yearly subscriptions by offering Schindler's sermons free of charge. "No literary papers in *The Globe*," wrote that journal, ". . . have caused so wide an interest as those of Rabbi Schindler on MODERN JUDAISM AND ITS BELIEFS." Similarly, the otherwise unspirited *Transcript* spiritedly urged its readers to follow the rabbi's discourses; for "the enormous influence which the Hebrew race has exerted . . . in the history of the world makes it interesting to know where the present representatives of that wonderful nation stand in the turmoil of . . . modern intellectual life."

The rabbi corrected misconceptions of Judaism that

earlier had led to prejudice. In his popular "Jesus of Nazareth," delivered before Congregationalist and Unitarian audiences, he noted that the Romans, not the Jews, had crucified the Nazarene; for neither the method of execution nor the trial was part of ancient Hebrew legal practice. Schindler also broke through the separateness of Orthodoxy to comment on the relationship of Christianity to Judaism for the *Globe*, which asked him to write a piece on the accuracy of a play set in the synagogue of Jesus' day. The rabbi's observations on moot points concerning the origins of Christianity were less significant for their contents than for the fact that a Jewish minister would discuss Jesus in public. No Orthodox rabbi had done so before. Schindler showed, by example, that liberal Jews were interested and viewed rationally the religious traditions of their Christian neighbors.

Similarly, Temple Israel's leader hoped to dissipate Jewish misconceptions of Christianity. "We must learn," he preached, "to understand our neighbor . . . for at present we do not know him and our ignorance . . . breeds . . . prejudice . . . against him. . . ." He inveighed against the exclusiveness of Orthodox Judaism. The study of comparative religion makes foolish "the notion that one religion only can be the right one." Indeed, "all religions appear like flowers in the garden of humanity." He reminded his people that Christianity was not a homogeneous whole, that forms and theologi-

cal differences separated various sects, and that the Unitarians, because they were returning to the "Jewish conception of God," had more in common with liberal Jews than with orthodox Christians. There was no need to fear that Judaism would die if Jews recognized the validity of Christianity, that the younger Jews would give up their religion for the other. An up-to-date Judaism, Schindler asserted, would have the vitality and strength to survive.

Under the influence of the new school of Biblical criticism and the theory of evolution, Solomon Schindler rejected the belief in a personal God and the divine origin of the Bible. The concept of the Creator had evolved through several stages: "from a household god into a tribal god, then into a national divinity, finally into the god of the Universe." God was First Cause and Clockmaker. He was not the capricious, jealous Jehovah who had chosen the Hebrews as His special children; nor could He intervene personally on their behalf. "To seek him," Rabbi Schindler said, "will mean to enter into the spirit of His laws, of the justice and wisdom of which the whole universe will be acknowledged to be one grand manifestation." The fact that God did not dictate the Old Testament from on high reduced neither His stature nor the merits of the Holy Book: indeed it reveals, said Schindler, the essential wisdom of the early Hebrews and proves, moreover, the evolutionary thesis that each age fashions religious beliefs for its own needs.

If there was no God who was exclusively interested in Jews, and no infallible book, then there could be no basis for the belief in a Messiah. With the evolutionary hypothesis as his instrument of analysis and history as his laboratory, Rabbi Schindler traced the origin, development, and frustration of the hope for a Hebrew Savior. He pointed out that the notion originated during the Babylonian captivity when the Jews yearned for a political-military leader who would throw off their yoke and restore the Hebrew state to the old glory of David's kingdom. Five hundred years later, while under the domination of the Romans, a handful of the Jewish masses regarded Jesus as such a leader, but the bulk of the Palestinians ignored Him. After the introduction of Christianity and the Jewish Diaspora, the original Hebrew concept of a warrior-Messiah evolved into another form. In the misery and isolation of the ghettos, and under the influence of the Christian conception of the Savior, Jews developed the idea of a God-sent spiritual leader who would gather up the dispersed Hebrews, take them to Zion, and establish a universal order of peace and brotherhood with Jerusalem as the center.

The belief in a Hebrew Savior, said Schindler, died with Jewish emancipation following the American and French revolutions — and properly so, he thought. Ideas to him were like biological organisms: he believed with Darwin that only the fittest survived; and in a free, democratic country like America the hope for a Messiah

could hardly compete with the ideal of assimilation. In the United States the Hebrews had freedom of religion and speech, enjoyed the ballot, could aspire to political office, and enjoyed equal privileges of citizenship. Why then return to Palestine, an insignificant, poverty-stricken land on the Mediterranean? The Messianic hope, moreover, was out of step with nineteenth century conceptions of representative government. The Savior, after organizing the trek to Palestine, would no doubt wish to rule Zion by himself; and no rational democrat — Jew or Christian — could accept such a government. Finally, the wish to set up Jerusalem as the world capital, with Judaism in the driver's seat, was in conflict with the basic idea, propagated by the study of comparative religion, that all religions were equally valid. If American Jews insisted on yearning for a future religious uniformity let them note that: "The religion of the future will be neither specifically Jewish nor Christian nor Mohammedan. It will be an entirely new system, in which the immortal parts of all the present religions will be represented, but at the same time so equally balanced that none will dare to claim superiority."

For the ancient hope of a personal Savior unfit to survive in the competitive world of ideas, Rabbi Schindler substituted the nineteenth century concept of scientific and mechanical progress. Jesus of Nazareth and Bar Kockba, Solomon Molcho, David Reubeni, and Sabbatai Svi (sixteenth and seventeenth century pre-

tender-Messiahs), had not improved the world; they grew out of the misery of their times and left their societies in exactly the same condition that they found them. But the scientists, the inventors, the scholars — they were “the real saviors of humanity.” They broke down class distinctions, made possible representative government, and improved the standard of living. Above all, their “rails and electric wires have tied humanity into one large community, and through their agency all human beings have learned to regard one another as brethren, and to share the joys and woes of their fellow beings from pole to pole.”

Rabbi Schindler's rejection of the Messianic conception derived not only from his intellectual convictions but from his desire to Americanize Judaism. Although an internationalist in his socialist beliefs, he wished to sever all ties between the American Jews and their place of origin — remote and near. He believed that so long as Jews desired a return to Palestine, they would be distrusted as foreigners lacking in patriotism. Similarly, he had little patience with the Orthodox Jews of the North End, who did not understand the “spirit of Americanism” and who wished to perpetuate “European traditions and customs.” Insisting that a “man cannot have two countries at the same time,” he asserted that the Jew “will never be a good American citizen who always dreams of a return to the country from which he came, and who delights only in the customs and usages of the fatherland.”

If Judaism did not rest on the literal interpretation of the Bible, the belief in the Messiah, the Saturday Sabbath, the Orthodox ritual, and the faith in a personal God with the Jews as His chosen people, what was it then? In his *Dissolving Views in the History of Judaism*, Rabbi Schindler pointed out that the Jewish faith had gone through a process of evolution, changing its form in response to the pressures of the environment from its very inception: Moses, Isaiah, Maimonides, Mendelssohn, Wise — all had put their stamp on the faith. But always there remained a changeless core, for Judaism, according to Schindler, had ever been “the religion of humanity.”

In the far-off future, Rabbi Schindler foresaw a reconciliation of Christianity and Judaism, when racial prejudice and the belief in the divinity — and in the case of the Unitarians, the uniqueness — of Jesus would be no more. For the present, however, American Hebrews had to adapt their faith to the rational, tolerant, progressive milieu; break down parochial barriers dividing co-religionists of diverse European backgrounds; become Americans by nationality and Jews by religion; accept the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; and work for the ever upward progress of mankind “on the ladder of civilization.” This was essentially the creed of the Pittsburgh Platform, the declaration drawn up by sixteen Reform rabbis in 1885. Schindler endorsed their principles, but he came to his conclusions independently, and significantly, at the same time.

III

Behind Rabbi Schindler's efforts lay the thought that his kind of Judaism would win respect from liberal Christians. He was not disappointed. As he anticipated, orthodox Christians and Jews alike inveighed against him for rejecting the conception of a personal Messiah. But from Harvard's Divinity School came "praise to the Reform for the vigor with which it is carrying on its work, for its intellectual clearness and its ethical activity." Boston's *Transcript* noted with pleasure that the Jews, in turning their backs on Palestine, were "as American as any of us can be."

Schindler particularly delighted in the praise of the Unitarians, whom he admired for doing to Christianity what he was doing to Judaism. The Index Association published his sermons in pamphlet form and wished for "a few thousand dollars" to print "a large edition in handsome style. . . ." The Channing Club, rejoicing that Reform Judaism and Unitarianism had "few, if any . . . theological differences," announced that the "liberal Jew and the liberal Christian . . . meet today on common ground. . . ." In the preface to *Messianic Expectations*, Minot J. Savage hailed the rabbi's ideas as a sign of the age that the "Christian's ceasing to be a Christian, and the Jew's ceasing to be a Jew."

Such success as a theologian ultimately led to failure as a rabbi. It is doubtful that Solomon Schindler's as-

pirations were ever identical to those of his congregants. The latter wished to retain their Jewish identity; Schindler wished to destroy it. For him Reform, in Christianity as well as Judaism, was a first step toward a non-sectarian religion that would include the highest ethics in the Jewish-Christian tradition. He had been too fast in adopting Sunday services; and they were quickly dropped. He outraged his congregation early in the 1890's when he preached intermarriage between liberal Jews and liberal Christians. Twenty-five years after his arrival in Boston, Solomon Schindler was a confessed socialist and agnostic.

To congregants who had won economic success through hard work and self-reliance, Rabbi Schindler preached the state socialism and economic equality of Edward Bellamy. It was Schindler's hope that Bellamy's blueprint, if applied to America, would obliterate differences in class, race, and religion. Temple Israel's Jews, who had embraced Reform as a means to preserve Judaism in America, also heard their rabbi consign the Bible to the museum. In Schindler's *Young West*, a novel of the future, the hero turns to a science teacher when troubled by the mysteries of life and death, and is told that the first cause is unknown, that the conception of a personal God grew out of the insecurity of predatory capitalism, and that the belief in a hereafter can neither be affirmed nor denied. In place of sectarian worship, the rabbi proposed to substitute a secular and universal religion of humanity.

Solomon Schindler, the rabbi's son who never wanted to be a rabbi, clearly had ceased to be a Jew. In September, 1893, he and his congregants agreed to part, he to continue in free thought and socialism but later to return to Orthodoxy, they to hold fast to humanist Judaism.

IV

Solomon Schindler was, in his religious beliefs, fiercely American. As the leader of an immigrant church whose adherents felt that their individual futures were linked to the future of their adopted country, the rabbi labored to make Judaism conform, in spirit and form, to the dominant liberal faith in Boston — Unitarianism. There is nothing in Schindler's writings, or in the individual backgrounds of the members of his congregation, to suggest that Reform Judaism was a German importation. On the contrary, it was indigenous to this country, a product, on the one hand, of the desire to Americanize the ancient Hebrew creed, and on the other, of the contemporary science that was shattering traditional modes of thought in Western civilization.

Temple Israel's first Reform minister failed as a rabbi because he never overcame his ambivalence toward Judaism and his own Jewishness. Solomon Schindler, in Germany as well as in America, was a marginal man; and the rebellion that had begun in Silesia against an-

cestral religion, family, and state ended in Boston. There, placed in the position of bridging differences between Jews and non-Jews, he ultimately identified himself with the latter, especially with radical intellectuals who, like him, were at war with the status quo. The challenge before Charles Fleischer, Schindler's successor, was clear — to maintain a balance between modernism and an ancient faith.





Charles Fleischer

CHAPTER FIVE

Charles Fleischer:

Ardent Americanist

I

When Charles Fleischer arrived in Boston to assume rabbinical duties at Temple Israel, the Reverend Dr. Edward Everett Hale, who incarnated the liberal spirit of the city, welcomed him at the railroad station with the following words: "Now, my son, you, too are one of the preachers of New England." These words reveal the respect which Solomon Schindler had won for the Reform synagogue and the faith of Boston's progressive Yankee clergymen in Judaism to contribute to the evolving civilization of America. Throughout his tenure at Temple Israel, from 1894 through 1911, and as head of the non-sectarian Sunday Commons, from 1912 to 1918, Charles Fleischer spoke to Bostonians, both Jews and non-Jews, who gravitated toward the new, the strange, the experimental. In 1905, a newspaperman wrote that there was "no man in Boston . . . with a greater following among the young intellectuals."

Like Solomon Schindler, Charles Fleischer was an immigrant who hoped to emancipate himself and Judaism from old forms by embracing the American concept that religion must participate in the amelioration of society. Again like Schindler, his times were conducive to such a desire. The years 1894–1918 differed from the years 1874–1893 only in degree; Fleischer's age was even more receptive than that of Schindler's to rethinking traditional values and institutions. John Dewey and Charles Beard, Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, John Haynes Holmes and Stephen S. Wise — these men symbolize how Americans transformed their conceptions of man, society, and God. These men and their many co-workers and followers differed from one another, yet they all shared the hope that the life of the mind and the spirit ought to make society and men better. They emphasized action over contemplation, empirical observation over deductive dogma, evolutionary growth over the maintenance of the status quo. Fleischer's age was the age when the rebels triumphed, when non-conformist ministers, scholars, and statesmen basked in the high noon of reform.

Early in the twentieth century Temple Israel's rabbi joined the ranks of the rebels. By temperament he had always been one of them. As a youth, he outraged his superiors at Hebrew Union College by flirting with the agnostic ideas of Robert Ingersoll. Called before the

president, he retorted: "I am not a follower of Ingersoll, but I do think for myself." In Boston he continued to think for himself, championing what was new. He put Sunday services on a permanent basis at his synagogue, inaugurated the practice of exchanging pulpits with both Unitarian and Trinitarian Christians, and fused Judaism with the Transcendentalism of Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was the first Boston rabbi to invite social reformers to speak from his pulpit, such as Alice Stone Blackwell, the feminist. The first Jewish poet of the city, he composed verse for the summer colony of liberal intellectuals at Greenacre, New Hampshire, and was honored with the presidency of the literary and Beacon Hillish Browning Society. He was also the first Boston clergyman to go up in a balloon. Charles Fleischer loved novelty almost for its own sake; his motto was that men should "always [show] dissatisfaction with things as they are. . . ."

Endowed with extreme good looks, Temple Israel's rabbi made rebellion romantically attractive. A bachelor throughout his tenure at the synagogue (he married only in 1919), he was considered one of the handsomest unattached men in Boston. Evangeline Adams has described him as the "Beau Brummel of the Back Bay," while one newspaperman was struck with his resemblance to Andrea del Sarto, the Renaissance painter. Fleischer's good friend, John Singer Sargent, as well as his wife, believed that he looked like Edgar Allan Poe.

This impression Sargent recorded in a black and white portrait of Fleischer — arched eyebrows, dark eyes, black hair, luxuriant mustache, thin nose. The over-all effect is one of sensitivity, and Fleischer's ever present black-silk "artist's tie" heightened that effect. Yet there was nothing delicate about the man. He was of average height and sturdy build, and went off with John Sargent to climb mountains in Alaska.

His voice, his contemporaries report, was that of a poet, clear, lyrical, sweet; and he often expressed his thoughts in the language of Browning and Byron, Whitman and Emerson, whom he read prodigiously. His bachelor apartment went with his manner. Somewhat bohemian, it contained flowers, the art of half a dozen nations (including a frieze of Orpheus and Eurydice), and books that spilled out from the shelves to the floor, tables, and chairs. For companionship he kept two pets, "a King Charles Spaniel, which announces all guests and sees them to the portal when they leave, and a Swiss canary, whose jubilant carolling is smothered in his throat by an admonition from his master when the talk is too weighty a character for such an accompaniment." Temple Israel's rabbi also sang well.

Admired in 1905 as "one of the most intellectual and radical Jews in America," Charles Fleischer achieved success from humble origins. Born in Breslau, Germany, December 23, 1871, he emigrated nine years later to America with his widowed mother and three brothers.

They settled on New York's East Side. Charles, the intellectual of the family, earned an A.B. at C.C.N.Y. (1888), went on to Cincinnati for a Degree of Rabbi at Hebrew Union College and a Litt. B. at the University of Cincinnati, both of which he attained in 1893, and served Rabbi Berkowitz of Philadelphia as an assistant until called to Boston in 1894. Given his talents in music, art, scholarship, and oratory, he soon became a "Boston institution".

As his popularity increased, Unitarians, progressive Congregationalists, non-Jewish ladies' clubs, and reform groups of one sort or another sought him out as a lecturer. He delivered a paper at the Theodore Parker Centenary; contributed to the *Arena*; joined the liberal Twentieth Century Club; wrote a column for Hearst's *Boston American*; and lectured throughout New England on democracy, education, and the relations of Jews and Gentiles. In time his associates and friends included President Eliot of Harvard, Robert A. Woods of South End House, Edwin D. Mead of the *New England Magazine*, as well as numbers of Unitarian clergymen. When after 1906 Temple Israel adopted, on his urging, Sunday services, he preached to an audience that regularly numbered nearly as many non-Jews as Jews.

Here was the rub. The non-Jews who admired the rabbi were liberal Yankees who, like Fleischer, embraced the traditions of the New England Renaissance. Thus,

Benjamin Orange Flower, editor of the *Arena*, complimented the Jewish minister in the best way he thought possible by placing him among the “young scholars . . . coming to the front and taking up the work once so gloriously carried forward by Lowell, Channing, Parker, Emerson, Whittier, and Phillips.” Flower meant that Temple Israel’s pastor was more interested in sociology than theology, more devoted to unifying the human race than perpetuating ethnic and religious divisions. Could Fleischer believe himself to be heir of New England’s great progressive Protestants and remain a Jew? How long he struggled over his two heritages is not clear, but by 1908 he made it known that he preferred Emerson to Moses; and in 1911 he left Temple Israel and Judaism to found the Sunday Commons, a non-sectarian religion to promote the amelioration of society and the fusion of America’s diverse stocks into a new people — Boston’s first community church.

In 1919 he married Mabel R. Leslie, a gifted and intellectual Vermonter of Scotch descent and Presbyterian upbringing who shared his views. The Reverend Dr. Charles Cummings, the successor of Edward Everett Hale, performed the marriage ceremony, which Fleischer invented so that “the bridegroom verbally recognizes the full equality of his bride.” After the Sunday Commons failed to survive the 1914–1918 war and the reaction that followed it, the Fleischers left Boston in 1922 for New York, she to practice law, and he to do editorial

work for William Randolph Hearst's *Journal American*. Charles Fleischer died July 2, 1942, surrounded in death, as in life, by friends who had rejected the parochialism of race and religion. Dr. John Haynes Holmes of the Community Church of New York officiated at his funeral, delivering a eulogy that lasted for more than an hour. Charles Fleischer was cremated, and his remains were placed in a non-sectarian cemetery, as he had requested before death.

II

Charles Fleischer had been installed in the pulpit of Temple Israel to preserve the Jewish identity of his congregation. Solomon Schindler, after successfully instituting a number of reforms (English prayer book, organ, choir, family pew, male worship without hats), had outraged his congregants when he sanctioned intermarriage with liberal Christians. He also failed to convert them to the socialism of Edward Bellamy, which he embraced as a means to create a society free of class, race, and religious differences. The Temple's congregation comprised second generation American Jews who were merchants of one sort or another and who aspired to the rational religion of Unitarianism. They did not want to revolutionize society; they wanted to belong to it. They accepted humanism and humanitarianism, but they would not convert the synagogue into a commu-

nity church or a society for ethical culture. While aspiring to friendly relations with their Christian neighbors, they also desired the fellowship of Jews, as Jews. In short, they would melt, had melted the frozen form of Orthodoxy, but they would not be melted down into the universal man who proclaimed his loyalty to all mankind and refused allegiance to his immediate ethnic and religious group.

All this Rabbi Fleischer understood, and for a dozen years or so he did not, *from the pulpit*, go beyond the limits of Reform Judaism or the Unitarianism upon which it had been modelled. Like other liberal clergymen, he accepted Charles Darwin and the Social Gospel, urged the progressive improvement of society. With Whitman and Emerson he spoke of the mission of America to democratize the world, and also of their faith in all of America's immigrant groups to contribute to the New World culture that was in the making. A cultural pluralist before the term was coined, the rabbi of Temple Israel preached that his people could be Americans and Jews at the same time, provided they were humanists and humanitarians.

The Jews, according to Fleischer, were a religious group, not a nation. Sharing this view with all Reform rabbis of the day, he immediately affiliated his house of worship with the liberal Union of American Hebrew Congregations and adopted the Union Prayer Book — the standard liturgy for Reform synagogues. When,

early in the twentieth century, Zionist leaders attempted to recruit followers in Boston, Fleischer insisted that Jewish nationalism had died nearly 2,000 years ago; "we Jews in America are not Jews, but Americans in nationality." He urged Jews who found Europe intolerable to emigrate to America, not to agitate for either Uganda or Palestine. In the New World "sheer humanism — the progressive application of moral ideals to all phases of human relationship — will . . . win their battles and . . . the Jews voice [will] . . . mingle with the chorus. . . ."

The "chorus" comprised the diverse groups that had emigrated to these shores. To a Congregationalist men's club, Fleischer, with a footnote to Ralph Waldo Emerson, lectured that "the strength of a community . . . is measured by the . . . variety . . . of . . . types," and that America should therefore encourage the plurality of immigrant cultures. If, on the other hand, the immigrants and their descendants became exactly like older Americans, the nation would turn into an "English colony . . . an outpost of Anglo-Saxon civilization." As Emerson foresaw, Fleischer continued, the New World, because of its heterogeneous population, would ultimately create a society unlike anything from which America's immigrants had come in the Old World. The Jews, too, would "enrich our land with spiritual wealth"; and they had "a worthy reason for their differences . . . [a] long history. . . ."

The new temple building (1907) embodied Rabbi

Fleischer's idea that the Jew must retain his identity as religionist so as to contribute to American culture. The style was neither Georgian nor Neo-Classical; the synagogue was easily distinguishable from a chaste New England church. Nor was it done in the then contemporary architecture that drew its model from Romanesque France and Renaissance Italy. The motif was Middle Eastern, to symbolize "the religion which has come to us from the most ancient time." The central dome stood for the Hebrew belief in a single God, and the seven windows on each side represented the Jewish idea that seven was a perfect number. The wall band purported to represent the phylactery, while the onyx ark, the interior marble, and the two exterior pylons were facsimiles of the originals in Solomon's Temple. Yet the synagogue at Commonwealth Avenue did not only look back. The organ pipes, shaped like trumpets — the symbols of victory — spoke for "the confident world-outlook of the Jewish faith." The inscription, "Dedicated to the Brotherhood of Man. Consecrated to the Fatherhood of God," embodied the humanism and humanitarianism of Boston's Reform Jews.

From the pulpit, Rabbi Fleischer constantly spoke, as had his predecessor, on the need of Judaism to be the religion of humanity. In a Jewish New Year's address in 1899, he noted: "New England's universal seer, Emerson, epitomizes the teaching of history substantially thus. 'Teachers of Truth and Ministers of Justice

may fail, but Truth and Justice never.' This has been the practical faith of Israel. . . ." American Judaism, he continued, must be a missionary force to propagate the moral truth that "not only does righteousness exalt a nation, but unrighteousness inevitably causes its downfall." Again, as he put it in a *Succoth* sermon, the Jews must "live religion", its ethical precepts, and encourage others to do so.

In practice this meant that Temple Israel must combat social evil. From the pulpit, Rabbi Fleischer inveighed against the imperialists of 1899. Where France had violated its belief in fraternity by persecuting Dreyfus, so America, in coercing Filipinos, "is doomed to fail in its larger mission . . . to assure the success of democracy." During the election of 1904, the rabbi, in a sermon delivered on the Day of Atonement, declared that Theodore Roosevelt, who unrighteously glorified war and conquest, would if elected President betray America's principles. Similarly, he attacked the immigration restrictionists who, out of base racist motives, would end the great folk migration that had made the nation unique. The Jewish clergyman also preached that advocates of a high tariff rested their case on a false sense of national superiority — unrighteousness.

With the son of William Lloyd Garrison, Rabbi Fleischer appeared before the General Court of Massachusetts to argue for the abolition of capital punishment, which he called a "barbarous institution." He

joined Edwin D. Mead and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, fellow Bostonians, in the crusade for the equal rights of women; "we have no right", he wrote "to discriminate between the sexes"; "Democracy should talk no more about sex than it does sect." In a still prudish day, he championed planned parenthood, and the idea that "people must be properly mated from the point of view of eugenics before they are allowed to enter matrimony." On this last question, Rabbi Fleischer, like the scientists of the day, believed in heredity, which contradicted his basic faith that the American melting pot would transform its human ingredients into a higher form. "For parents," he noted, "to pass on poor physique, low intelligence, ugly prejudices, or other vicious or weak ethical standards . . . is to be guilty of an assault . . . against which the race must . . . defend itself."

The chief problems for Rabbi Fleischer and fellow reformers were those that derived from rapid urbanization and industrialization. He perceived that America would one day be a nation of cities, and that it had no traditions for an urban civilization, save one: that as a nation in the making America had always created traditions when required. He urged the planning of cities, such as was being done in Europe, so that each urban center would "develop an organic unity and individuality. . . ." At Temple Israel, he defied the label-mongers by declaring his attachment to municipal socialism, whose principle he said, had been validated by the pub-

lie school system and the fire and police departments. When, by 1908, Theodore Roosevelt captured the public imagination by flaying "bad" corporations, Rabbi Fleischer forgave the bully of San Juan Hill and hailed him as a modern Isaiah; "It is just as much a holy work for Mr. Roosevelt to say Thou shalt not to malefactors of great wealth as for any prophet . . . in Palestine." Similarly, he praised Charles Evans Hughes for exposing the malpractices of New York's insurance companies, and cheered to the muckraking of wicked St. Louis.

Believing that "Nothing human is foreign to me," and that a "congregation can be . . . worth while only if it concerns itself with the whole range of human relations," Rabbi Fleischer made Temple Israel into a civic forum. To the synagogue he brought fellow reformers as guest lecturers: Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Edwin D. Mead, Charles H. Dole and Charles Ames, Julia Ward Howe and Alice Stone Blackwell, Robert A. Woods and Meyer Bloomfield. These liberals were variously known as advocates of world peace, municipal socialism, city planning, settlement houses, equal rights for women, free thought. Rabbi Fleischer had made good on his objective to "have the genius of the Jew reborn for service for this new day. . . . [to] dream the democratic dream."

Until 1907, the Jewish clergyman and his congregation differed from liberal Unitarians and Congregationalists in only two respects: they neither worshipped on

Sunday nor accepted Jesus as part of their heritage. Those two differences were removed after the consecration of the new temple building in 1907. In that year Sunday services were adopted; and one year later, Rabbi Fleischer, speaking from his pulpit during the Christmas week, preached that while Jews could not regard Jesus as the miraculously begotten son of God, they must embrace Jesus as the greatest of all Jewish prophets. Jesus had understood God's message that the human race was one, that we must all love one another. "Jews and Christians", Fleischer observed, "will be reconciled and reunited, largely through Jesus, in love of God and service by man."

Shortly thereafter the rabbi agreed to exchange pulpits with the Reverend Dr. George A. Gordon of the Old South Congregational Church and the Reverend Dr. Thomas Van Ness of the Second Church. That Fleischer and Van Ness should exchange pulpits was no surprise, for the latter was a Unitarian. Dr. Gordon, however, was a Congregationalist and, while championing Progressive Orthodoxy, was the leading Trinitarian Christian in Boston. To his orthodox critics, George A. Gordon retorted, in a way made possible by Fleischer's acceptance of Jesus, that: "Jesus was a Jew, the sovereign Jew, and gave himself in life and death for his people. I infer from this fact that he would not be displeased by an act of respect done to his people by a minister of the gospel." When Fleischer addressed Dr. Gordon's

congregation, he did so, as he put it, as a "fellow-Jew of Jesus" to emphasize the latter's "supreme injunctions to love God and to love man . . . the sublimated spiritual commonsense of mankind."

III

Preaching from pulpits once occupied by Cotton Mather and Ralph Waldo Emerson, lecturing successfully throughout New England, and spending more time with non-Jews than with Jews, Charles Fleischer wished to terminate his contract with Temple Israel in 1908. He stayed on only when given *carte blanche*. Even earlier though, Rabbi Fleischer had been expressing ideas, but away from the pulpit, that showed him to be outside Judaism.

By his own admission, Charles Fleischer's "patron saint" was Ralph Waldo Emerson. The rabbi's library (kept intact by his wife in New York) reveals that he read and re-read the works of the Concord philosopher, heavily annotating them. In Fleischer's dog-eared copy of Emerson's *Nature*, the following is underlined: "Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?" It is not known just when the rabbi read *Nature*, but as early as 1896, at Greenacre, he had written:

*Take this message to heart:
All, — of God is a part.*

Again at Greenacre, he seemed to write like a "transparent eyeball":

Omnipresence! Omnipresence!
Manifest Thyself in me!
Omnipresence! Omnipresence!
Manifest Thyself in me!

Fleischer then not only rejected the Orthodox God, but also Solomon Schindler's concept of God as Clockmaker and First Cause. To his congregation, when his view of the Divine Being was made known, he was thought to be either a Pantheist or a Transcendentalist.

Disapproving the God of his fathers, Fleischer, by 1902, also intimated that there was a religion other than Judaism to which he was devoted. He chose to disclose his opinion in the *Arena*, the outspoken advocate of newness. "We of America," Fleischer echoed Whitman and Emerson, "are . . . the 'peculiar people' consecrated to that . . . 'mission' of realizing Democracy which is potentially a universal spiritual principle, aye, a religion. . . ." He "would have men like Washington, Samuel Adams, Jefferson, Lincoln . . . John Brown (. . . the spiritual soldiers of democracy) . . . placed literally in a calendar of saints; . . . to be revered by our future Americans as apostles of our Republic." Faith in these democratic demigods would give the nation's diverse immigrant stocks a single heritage that would smelt them down into a single people — the Americans.

The *Arena* article, as well as another one the following year, did not go beyond saying that the school must teach democracy. In 1905, however, Rabbi Fleischer asserted that the synagogues and churches were outmoded, and that a new church must preach the democratic faith. Save for the Roman Catholics, most people, he declared, were dissatisfied with their denominations, as evidenced by the falling off of attendance. The church and the synagogue were becoming "feminized," and the unethical practices of disreputable businessmen revealed that religion in America was one thing on Sunday and another on Monday. We need, Fleischer wrote, a religion that will talk less of God and more of good, a new prophet like "Jesus, Isaiah . . . who will talk . . . about the sort of man that the individual must be in himself and in his social relations. . . ." The sanction for ethics must rest on man's reason to appreciate democracy, not his fear that God punishes immoral conduct. Fleischer's conclusion, borrowed from Emerson, was that America, forging a new people out of its many ethnic groups, would create the new faith; and that, as greater intercourse developed among nations, the American creed would spread throughout the world, perfecting human society.

After 1908, when Fleischer knew that he would not long remain in Judaism, he expressed his advanced views more often, and from the pulpit as well as outside it. He declared to his congregation that already Jews were

of mixed blood, and that they must further intermarry with the other peoples of America to build the "new nation . . . to emerge from the melting pot." "Obviously", Fleischer concluded, "such fusion means annihilation of identity." At a Union Thanksgiving Service at the Second Church, where his congregation had joined Dr. Van Ness' for the occasion, he declared that, while it was a sign of a larger fraternal spirit for "liberal Jews and Unitarians [to] come together," a "formal union" of all progressive religionists would be more in keeping with the democratic creed of permanently abolishing parochial barriers.

When in 1909, President Eliot of Harvard published his views on the need for a new religion similar to Fleischer's (in a letter to Fleischer, Eliot acknowledged the kinship), Temple Israel's rabbi defended the Harvard scholar against his orthodox critics. "I assent", he stated, "to Dr. Eliot's . . . creed which reverences truth, . . . science, . . . the individual, . . . social service," and rejects traditional theology. Similarly, at the Theodore Parker Centenary (1910) Fleischer announced his desire to "promote the cause of free religion to which he [Parker] was consecrated;" Judaism and Christianity, Mohammedanism and Buddhism — all chapters in the history of religion — must be effaced for the "free and natural religion" of democracy.

The climax came dramatically in 1911, when Solomon Schindler, Rabbi Emeritus, who had started the

revolution at Temple Israel in the 1870's, appeared before his congregation to preach "Mistakes I Have Made". Reconverted in old age to the faith of his fathers, the one-time radical hoped to start a reaction that would place Judaism in a position similar to that which it had occupied before the advent of Reform. My chief mistake, Schindler exclaimed, was to try to make "the Jew like the Gentile." That failed; "the Jew will never succumb . . . to the melting pot." American Jews must form their own communities, as the God of the Hebrews commanded. They must also return to old forms, accept a uniform creed, pay less attention to reason and more to emotion. Parker, Spencer, Huxley, Wallace, Darwin, Ingersoll — these men, Schindler lamented, had betrayed him into believing that the Jews should give up their peoplehood for universalism.

Shortly thereafter Charles Fleischer, who was now ready to resign his pulpit, answered Schindler in a sermon, "Some Seeming Mistakes Which I Have Gladly Made". The younger man, unlike his older predecessor, did not wish to make the Jew like the Gentile; he hoped to fuse *all* Americans into a *new* people. Schindler, he remarked, was narrowminded to care more for Jews than to foster "the union of the human family on an increasingly inclusive basis." Further, if Jews would not mix their blood with other Americans, then logically they ought to be Zionists. As for setting up separate communities, that was reactionary, as well as foolhardy.

"Having moved out of the Ghetto, there ought to be no return." Defiantly, Charles Fleischer concluded: "I have gladly made the seeming mistake of encouraging assimilation. . . ."

Temple Israel chose neither the reaction of Schindler nor the radicalism of Fleischer. When, in 1911, the latter's contract terminated, they engaged Rabbi Harry Levi, a moderate, whose views were those of the Fleischer of 1900 — those of Reform Judaism. In taking leave of his congregation, Charles Fleischer declared that he was giving up the husk of Judaism for the core of free religion: for a Transcendental God, science, progress, and the love that "draws man to man" and "rises above and beyond the barriers of nation, creed or color." Thereafter he would worship Man, whose boundless goodness would create a society as yet undreamt "by the most visionary . . . of utopians." After seventeen years in the Jewish pulpit, during half of which time he led the dual existence of saying one thing to Jewish audiences and another to non-Jews, Charles Fleischer was relieved to proclaim: "I am henceforth beyond . . . sectarianism. At last, the world is mine, and I am the world's."

IV

In his twenty-ninth year Charles Fleischer told a Boston audience in Parker Memorial Hall: "I thank God that I have not been born an American, so that I might

have a chance to achieve my Americanism." An immigrant, he discovered the historic meaning of the land of his adoption in the philosophy of American liberalism. Ralph Waldo Emerson in particular instructed him in the idea that the New World was really new, and that Americans, as individuals and as a people, must consecrate themselves to arrange society so as to assure every person a measure of human dignity. As a rabbi, Fleischer therefore formulized for a recent immigrant group and its descendants the values America lived by.

Charles Fleischer failed in the end as a rabbi because, like Schindler, he was a marginal man who lost his marginality. In explaining Judaism to Christians and in splicing Judaism with Transcendentalism, he ultimately identified with the liberal Protestant tradition of New England. The Jewish ambassador of good will to Christendom left the group he represented to join the group to which he had been sent. Alike Solomon Schindler and Charles Fleischer were unable to stabilize the religious revolution that had begun in Temple Israel in 1874. It remained for Rabbi Harry Levi to fasten the humanism of Judaism to Jewish moorings.

CHAPTER SIX

Harry Levi: Jewish Pastor

I

Present day members of Temple Israel who were congregants of Rabbi Levi revere his memory. He was endowed with a high intelligence, but more than that, with a deep spirituality. His signal contribution to Reform Judaism was to present Judaism in its emotional side and not entirely as a matter of reason. Unlike his marginal, rebelling, European-born predecessors, Rabbi Levi was a native American who felt altogether at home in both the Jewish and American environments. He had no compulsion to change the substance of Reform Jewish thought. Rather he accepted what already had been wrought and became a model pastor.

Temple Israel's third Reform rabbi believed that Jews were a religious and not an ethnic group, and that the Jewish religion must promote the progress of the human race. These were precisely the ideas of Solomon Schindler, the Temple's pioneer in theology, indeed the prevail-



Alfred Brown

Harry Levi

ing ideas of Reform Judaism. Yet Rabbi Levi was something of a pioneer, too. He broke ground in the field of human relations; for the first time Boston's Reform synagogue had a pastor of the flock rather than the creator of an intellectual system. And this is exactly what Rabbi Levi's congregants wanted — a truly spiritual leader who would enrich the personality of every individual whom he touched. Harry Levi succeeded where Solomon Schindler and Charles Fleischer failed because he was by temperament — not by accident — a rabbi.

He was eminently suited for the role of pastor. He spoke persuasively without sacrificing dignity, and his sermons were models in simplicity, clarity, and euphony. Solomon Schindler and Charles Fleischer lectured; Harry Levi preached. Contemporaries report unanimously that Rabbi Levi was compassionate. Equally important, he had the rare talent of understanding the personal problems of his congregants, to whom he communicated his own optimism that reason could solve nearly all problems. He was in his serenity a source of strength. Unlike his predecessors, who were *respected* for their intellectuality, Harry Levi was *loved* for his moral wisdom, evenness of personality, and sweetness of character. Joshua Loth Liebman called him a "saint".

The rabbi was a man of convictions who also knew the value of tact such that he was able to persuade without antagonizing. He did not, like Fleischer and

Schindler, shock or startle or develop the desire to be different from his congregants. Harry Levi was close to the norm even in physical appearance — of average height and build, bespectacled, dignified and restrained — again differing from the intense-looking, bearded Schindler and the almost excessively handsome Fleischer. Temple Israel's rabbi was like most native, middle-class, American men. He was different, however, in the degree of his insight into personal problems, his pulpit eloquence, and his ability and devotion to share himself.

Solomon Schindler and Charles Fleischer displayed none of the administrative talent that has come to characterize the modern rabbinate, but their successor was an imaginative and hard-working executive. Harry Levi served as spiritual leader of a vigorous Sisterhood and Brotherhood. He built up and administered four religious schools that ultimately had a student body of eleven hundred Jewish youngsters. He organized the Little Theater Group to present plays on the theme of religious toleration. Similarly, he sponsored the Juniors, a club of young people that invited Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to discuss the means of inter-denominational understanding. In 1928, the present Meeting House was constructed to house the numerous activities that Harry Levi had added to the life of Temple Israel. Despite the time-consuming duties of supervising a large and expanding religious plant, the rabbi was always available to the members of his congregation who



The Meeting House

Fay Foto Service, Inc.

wanted advice on their careers, their marriage, their family difficulties. Rabbi Levi was a comforter and a counsellor who gave priority to the every day needs of his people rather than to the personal excitement of creating a new theology.

Clearly, Harry Levi made a distinguished career for himself in the rabbinate, indeed he already had distinguished himself in that career when he assumed his Boston post. In 1911, he was a mature thirty-six, not a boy as Charles Fleischer had been in 1894; and he had none of Solomon Schindler's ambivalence toward Judaism and the pulpit. From his earliest years in Cincinnati, where he was born August 7, 1875, Harry Levi wanted to be a rabbi, a desire that his Polish-born elders shared. Precocious, he enrolled at Hebrew College at thirteen and at the University of Cincinnati at seventeen to pursue concurrently degrees in divinity and the arts. He was graduated from both institutions at the age of twenty-one. Immediately thereafter he accepted a pulpit in Wheeling, West Virginia, where he remained fourteen years until called to Boston. His most significant literary work during that time was a study of the Jew in English literature. More important, he was seasoned by experience such as to move easily into his Boston role.

Temple Israel, as the foremost synagogue in New England, expected its minister to join the liberal Protestant clergymen who gave intellectual and moral leader-

ship to the community. The congregation also intended that its rabbi serve as an emissary of good will to non-Jews. Harry Levi carried off both functions so well that by the 1920's he was regarded as one of America's most prominent ministers. Liberals of all denominations, recognizing in him a force for good, invited him to write for the journals and to speak at meetings. The Twentieth Century Club quickly enrolled him in its membership; the Community Church and Ford Hall Forum welcomed him to their rostrums. Levi was active in philanthropic work, such as the Massachusetts Anti-Tuberculosis Society, of which he was director. He crossed denominational lines to lecture at the progressive divinity schools of Harvard and Boston University.

With the invention of radio Rabbi Levi's influence carried beyond Boston; beginning in 1924 Sunday services at Temple Israel were broadcast fortnightly throughout New England. Harry Levi's radio sermons won him a reputation for modernism in religion, and certain of them were selected for publication in two volumes, *The Great Adventure* (1929) and *A Rabbi Speaks* (1930). When he retired in 1939, after enjoying the longest tenure in the history of the congregation, Governor Leverett Saltonstall, Mayor Maurice Tobin, and President Karl T. Compton of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology expressed the gratitude of an entire community for the good that Temple Israel's pastor had done. That community, not only his congregation,

mourned the passing of Harry Levi when he died June 13, 1944.

II

Until the woeful decade of the 1930's Harry Levi's thought reflected the happy optimism of the American middle class. He and the members of Temple Israel were members of that middle class. An immigrant's son, Levi had known a career of uninterrupted success, and he approached life with the confidence of those who have risen without excessive pain. His congregants, well-to-do businessmen and professionals, had similar histories of rapid incorporation into the rights, privileges, and comforts of American life. Rabbi and congregants were therefore predisposed to accept prevailing Reform Jewish thought — that God was kind, that man was good, and that all would turn out for the best. Harry Levi believed in progress, the cardinal principle of the Enlightenment, because he and the members of Temple Israel had known nothing but progress.

He was too sweet-tempered to delight in polemics, yet it was necessary to debate the pessimists who were nostalgic for "The Good Old Days." The New England of Rabbi Levi's day was particularly fertile in nostalgia. He observed that the persecution of the Jews, the Inquisition, and the Albigensian Crusade were proof that the thirteenth century was not the greatest century, as the

neo-medievalists contended. And the Salem witch trials were rebuttal to the Anglo-Saxon racists who designated colonial New England as the golden age of America. Contemporary treatment of prisoners and the poor, contemporary freedom for women and children, contemporary advancement in technology and science, contemporary toleration for dissenting religious groups — these, Harry Levi maintained, demonstrated the superiority of the present over the past. That the future must be made even better than the present made the rabbi's meliorism militant. And that the Jewish religion had to promote the better future was accepted as the very essence of Judaism.

Nothing, but nothing, shook the rabbi's confidence for some twenty years. He was so convinced of the abnormality of evil that in the 1920's he dismissed Italian Fascism as aberrant. The racist quotas of the National Origins Plan of 1924 irritated but did not alarm him; characteristically he prophesied that by midcentury there would be no invidious distinctions between old stock and new stock Americans. The Ku Klux Klan was written off as a vestige from the primeval past that would wither away under enlightened opinion. Whereas the immense blood-letting of World War I disillusioned a generation, it strengthened Rabbi Levi's confidence that thinking man would make the battlefield as obsolete as trial by battle.

Men need only to think right and do good for society

to go forward, Rabbi Levi urged. And since men were by nature both good and reasonable, it was merely a question of sweeping away the misunderstanding from which all evil flowed. Throughout the rabbi's sermons ran the theme of fostering greater understanding — between businessmen and workers, Jews and Christians, natives and immigrants, Negroes and whites. Because the League of Nations and the World Court were designed to promote international understanding, Levi urged that the United States join them. He cheered to the disarmament conferences of the 1920's. The rabbi's faith in good will was such that he hailed the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which outlawed war by international agreement, as the most important watershed in the history of diplomacy.

For two decades a New England radio audience listened to Harry Levi preach racial and religious understanding. When he came to Boston Americans were well on the way to thinking in those racist terms that led to the discriminatory immigration laws of the 1920's and the Fascist demagoguery of the 1930's. The rabbi defended with eloquence and without equivocation the heritage of the melting pot. America, he declared, was neither an Anglo-Saxon, nor a white, nor a Christian, nor a Protestant land. Rather it was a democratic way of life that claimed allegiance from persons of diverse ethnic, religious, and racial groups. People had the right to be different, Harry Levi explained, for variety made

life interesting. More frequently, however, Temple Israel's pastor emphasized the similarities rather than the differences among Americans. Because he believed that all human beings were children of God, he pointed out that Negroes were more alike than different from whites; that Jews and Christians had more in common than not. The thesis of "My Country," one of Rabbi Levi's most eloquent radio sermons, was that "America belongs to those who earn it and to them alone," which meant that each generation must renew the contract with the humanitarian tradition that is America.

The desire to dissipate prejudice by minimizing differences was reflected in Harry Levi's conception of religion as ethics. In this respect he continued the idea of Schindler and Fleischer before they broke with Judaism. Characteristically, when invited to speak at the Community Church on "My Religion", he described not the uniqueness of Judaism but the essential and universal principle of all religions " 'to do justice and love mercy.' " In "The Rising Tide of Liberalism," a radio sermon, the rabbi rejoiced in Jews and Protestants coming together for fellowship and religious service; here was proof that the *common* link of seeking brotherhood through the one God was more important than *different* conceptions as to the nature of the Godhead and modes of worship. Similarly, the rabbi was heartened by the knowledge that Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Dr. Stephen S. Wise,

who propounded non-denominational but theist humanism, were "the three most popular preachers on the air in America. . . ." In the desire to prove that persons of all faiths were like unto one another, Rabbi Levi insisted that "the Jew is simply an average human being", no better, no worse, no different from others.

The sermons of Temple Israel's rabbi on private morality also contained the common principles that bind men together. Unlike his predecessors, Rabbi Levi often discoursed on purely personal matters. It was typical of Charles Fleischer to lecture on the metaphysics of Emerson, and equally typical for Harry Levi to preach on Emerson's essay on friendship. Speaking to a radio audience that comprised persons of different faiths and ancestries, Harry Levi gave homely advice on the home and hobbies, business and the professions, on the "art of living together." And whenever he invoked the name of God, he made sure that he would not offend sectarian sensibilities.

The good life was grounded in the old values. Temple Israel's rabbi deplored the excessive pursuit of money. Men must learn to use leisure wisely by taking up hobbies, such as hunting, fishing, or stamp collecting. Men and women must also value friendship, without which living could never be sweet. Above all, there was the home, and Levi urged greater love and understanding between husband and wife and between parents and children. The home must be a place in which to live,

and not a place at which only to sleep and eat. It was the rabbi's hope that the home would be stocked with good books, and that families would observe the religious holidays that brought out the spiritual in man. Harry Levi summed up the trinity of private morality when he asked his audience to renew faith in "holy homes, conjugal fidelity, marital morality."

Temple Israel's rabbi was in his personal life a conventional and simple man who shared the values of the New England middle class. Whether he spoke on hobbies or the home, friendship or the family, he praised simplicity: the simplicity of clothing, the simplicity of recreation, the simplicity of house furnishings. Doubtless he directed his message toward his own congregants who, as new members of the middle class, might profit from advice on how to live the gracious life. Yet, save for the fact that he was called rabbi, Harry Levi could be taken for a Yankee Protestant clergyman: in New England simplicity was almost a fetish. Nor was the rabbi different from the average middle class person in his objection to the iconoclasts of the 1920's who ridiculed bourgeois mores and who championed free love and trial marriage, flaming youth and the hip flask. Harry Levi believed that

*The men on earth build houses, halls, and chambers,
roofs and domes —*

*But the women of the earth — God knows! — the women
build the homes.*





The Synagogue — "a church like other churches."

A dissenter in his social views, Temple Israel's pastor was a conservative in defense of private morality against those who looked to Scott Fitzgerald, H. L. Mencken, and Greenwich Village.

John Griffin of the *Boston Post* ascribed to Rabbi Levi a genius for selling Judaism to Christians. One-third of the people who attended Sunday services at Temple Israel were non-Jews, and the rabbi reached an even larger audience over the air. Clearly, by the 1920's his pastorate had leaped over denominational walls to become a powerful force for religious toleration. His congregation, rejoicing in this achievement, wrote a life-term contract for Harry Levi in 1930, and also awarded him a prize for serving as "ambassador of good will to Christendom." Similarly, Hebrew Union College, his alma mater, conferred on him an honorary doctorate for improving relations between Jews and Christians in New England. The nature of Rabbi Levi's influence can be read in a letter written to him by one of the radio audience. For years this person had believed that a "synagogue was an unapproachable place where some sort of mysterious rites were practiced." Listening to Temple Israel's rabbi changed all of that: the synagogue turned out to be "just a church like other churches. . . ."

If the thought of Harry Levi and the liturgy of Temple Israel made Judaism just another church, then wherein lay the Jewishness of Reform Judaism? And what was the difference between the faith of Harry Levi

and that of non-theist, non-church-going humanists? More than once the pastor thought it necessary to explain why he was a theist, a supporter of institutional religion, and a Jew.

Harry Levi believed in God on faith. To faith he added the argument of design; only the existence of a rational, merciful, and just God could explain the order of nature, consciousness, intelligence, and human progress. Again, he had faith in the existence of a hereafter, but also reasoned that a rational God would not create man so as to destroy him after one moment in the eternity of time. A theist, Levi defended the church and the synagogue as institutions to propound God's highest moral truths. Finally, the rabbi explained that he was a Jew because he had been born into and reared in the Jewish faith. And there was no need to go elsewhere. As others satisfied their spiritual needs in the Protestant and Catholic communions, so he found in Judaism what he needed. He loved Judaism for its simplicity, rationalism, and lofty ethics. It was Harry Levi's supreme faith that American Judaism together with American Protestantism and American Catholicism would lead "to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth."

We can well imagine the feelings of this man of intense good will when the world took a turn for the worst in the 1930's. Central to Rabbi Levi's thought was the axiom that men were inherently decent and rational.

But the Depression, American anti-Semitism, German National Socialism, and World War II revealed a capacity for indecency and irrationality that not even the most dismal pessimists had forseen. What could men of good will say about a war that was supposed never to come; about mass poverty that turned back progress; about pathological racial hatred that defied reason? To some it seemed as if the generous hopes of the Enlightenment were vain dreams.

Rabbi Harry Levi, for the first time, faltered in his optimism. American Jew-baiters and German Nazis particularly made him think that the Age of Reason had run its course and become the age of unreason against the Jews. Whereas in the 1920's he had insisted that Jews were simply "average", in the 1930's and 1940's he taunted anti-Jewish demagogues with the reputation of Albert Einstein. Once he had emphasized the similarities between Jews and Christians, now he implored Jews to perpetuate their uniqueness. To a confirmation class in 1934 he remarked that anti-Semitism was unremovable and that young Jews must be prepared to live in a world that did not want them. In the middle of the Depression decade, the pastor of Temple Israel, who all his life had preached the perfectionist strain of the Enlightenment and the Messianic hope of Judaism, confessed: "What tomorrow may bring forth, no one can tell."

III

In Harry Levi Temple Israel finally found the rabbi it had hoped to find in 1874 and again in 1894. He was an American in birth, speech, idiom, and outlook. He was and remained a Jew. Between rabbi and congregants there always existed personal and ideological rapport. The congregation wanted its minister to be pastor, preacher, and teacher of the synagogue as well as Jewish representative to Christendom. Harry Levi acquitted himself brilliantly in these manifold responsibilities.

Unlike his predecessors Rabbi Levi remained faithful to the idea that Judaism and humanism were compatible. He did not make a new synthesis of the two but showed by example that the ethics of Judaism were coeval with the values of democracy. His radio pulpit in particular stood for the idea that America feeds on the good will of all men of whatever origin, indeed that it is a measure of strength for the nation to achieve moral unity in a heterogeneous population. The strains of a heterogeneous society are such that they challenge the ethical ingenuity of free men. Temple Israel's pastor, according to testimony from the Governor of the Commonwealth down to the student of the confirmation class, confronted those strains with the ingenuity of a free and Jewish American.

When Rabbi Levi retired in 1939 it was no longer a question of whether Judaism and humanism were com-

plementary but whether humanist Judaism was tailored for the modern world. Joshua Loth Liebman, his successor, thought that it was. However, he called for new insights into the human psyche. He was representative of an era in the belief that the key to human nature was psychiatry — the science of the irrational mind.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Joshua Loth Liebman: *Religio-Psychiatric Thinker*

I

Rabbis Solomon Schindler, Charles Fleischer, and Harry Levi grew up in a century that Alfred Russell Wallace designated *The Wonderful Century*, but Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman came to maturity in an age that W. H. Auden called *The Age of Anxiety*. That age is a key to his thought. Two Depression Presidents agreed that what Americans had most to fear was fear of fear. America's leading theologian preached that life was tragic in its irony. A once rational class of intellectuals delighted in the reality of Kafkaian unreality. Thinkers reflected a world of depression succeeded by war, nightmarish headlines that screamed attention to the breadline and Buchenwald, Coughlin and the Cominform, the atomic explosions at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Jews even more than before hoped for good will, while men everywhere looked for understanding of massive disorders. The character of the times explains



Solari

Joshua Loth Liebman

why nearly a million copies were sold of a book that was entitled *Peace of Mind*, and why that book was written.

Joshua Liebman's life embodied the antitheses of an era. High promise was terminated by unexpected death; singular achievement was countered by inner turmoil. His childhood was scarred by the divorce of his parents, and marred by the discomfiture of a prodigy who did not fit with older contemporaries. His adolescence was unusually stormy, for Joshua Liebman was troubled by the question, " 'Where is God?' " at — of all places — Hebrew Union College. He came to God after intense and prolonged introspection. At thirty-one, to satisfy his "wrestling spirit," which must comprehend the nature of man, Rabbi Liebman underwent psychoanalysis. In fine, *Peace of Mind* was both and at once a symptom of a disordered society and the autobiography of a once suffering soul.

That Western Civilization was disordered was painfully clear to Jews. The good will that had been built up since the Enlightenment seemed to have disappeared almost at once. By the early 1940's it was known that European Jewry had perished and that American Jewry was seriously menaced. Thirty years after Charles Fleischer agreed to exchange pulpits with Christian ministers Father Coughlin's Christian Front was making frightening progress in Boston. On what should have been a joyous occasion, the ninetieth anniversary

of Temple Israel, Joshua Liebman observed: "The Jewish soul is . . . bombed with the shrapnel of hatred and hostility." The President of Temple Israel, although a successful businessman and the father of two naval officers and a Vassar student, warned: "We Jews, all of us, wherever we live, whatever our affiliations, whether we belong to the synagogue or not, face a hostile world that affects our destiny, our security, and we must face it together."

Temple Israel's Jews reverted to ancestral traditions so as to strengthen group identity and close ranks against those who rejected them. Anti-Zionism had been central to Reform Judaism, but with the coming of Liebman the congregation supported the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel; and upon his death a forest of trees was planted in his name in the new state. Whereas Schindler and Fleischer had dispensed with the Hebrew Sabbath as a tribal vestige, Liebman and his congregation reinstated Friday evening worship; henceforth Temple Israel went to synagogue and not to church. Finally, the *Bar Mitzvah* came back, in addition to confirmation. Each of these measures repudiated the crucial doctrine of the Pittsburgh platform that Jews were only a religious group, like Baptists or Unitarians. Jews were now a people as well as a religious group.

United to face a common peril, Jews desired even more than heretofore good public relations with non-Jews. And frightened, leaders proposed measures which

an earlier and more secure generation never conceived. Joshua Liebman, for example, demanded in 1944 that the Boston Jewish Community Council publicly denounce Jewish black marketeers and dishonest war profiteers. The Council, he declared, would "be derelict in its duty if it confines itself to the negative task of combatting anti-Semitism without assuming the positive responsibility of seeking to discover the practices in Jewry which intensify anti-Semitism. . . ." Critics to the proposal responded that American courts, not Jewish vigilantes, must punish law breakers.

Public relations with Christendom took the traditional form of the active ambassadorship. Rabbi Liebman, willing, energetic, eloquent, tireless, and scholarly, was endowed with the talents required for the office. He led services and preached at the chapels of Harvard, Smith, Wellesley, and other colleges. He was given visiting faculty rank at Boston University and Andover-Newton Theological School. The chief executive of the Commonwealth appointed the rabbi to head the Governor's Committee on Racial and Religious Understanding for Massachusetts. Liebman was also active on the Committee of Army and Navy Religious Activities. Meanwhile his fortnightly broadcasts from Temple Israel reached, like those of Harry Levi, an audience of Christians as well as Jews. Their success led to a national hookup.

In 1946, *Peace of Mind* appeared. Reissued in paper

bound edition, translated into fourteen languages, and reviewed and discussed in all sorts of circles, the book had a phenomenal reception. It made the best seller lists in three weeks, and sold, before Liebman's death in 1948, more than 700,000 copies. *Reader's Digest* condensed it, while two other media of mass communication, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Look*, interviewed the rabbi and his family and gave long resumés of his ideas. Temple Israel's rabbi became at once a national, indeed an international, figure with considerable prestige to promote religious and racial understanding. The impact of his book was such that Temple Emanu-El of New York, the Canterbury of American Reform Judaism, offered Liebman a contract at whatever salary he would request. When the rabbi refused it to stay in Boston, Governor Bradford expressed with Temple Israel joyful surprise. In 1947, two years before his five year contract had run out, Joshua Loth Liebman was given life tenure.

The successful radio preacher and best-selling author achieved the renown that a brilliant and precocious youth had promised. Joshua Liebman was born in Hamilton, Ohio, 1907, of a long line of rabbis. Nineteen years later he was teaching Greek philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, his alma mater. He studied at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he became a Zionist, and took a doctorate in Hebrew Literature at Hebrew Union College. July 5, 1928, he married Fan Loth, his first cousin, who was to be an inseparable com-

panion and intellectual co-worker in a supremely happy marriage. Only twenty-seven, he succeeded to the pulpit of Chicago's oldest Reform congregation, Temple K.A.M., which included some of the city's wealthiest and most prominent Jews. The rabbi distinguished himself in pulpit eloquence and pastoral care, lectured at the University of Chicago, and played a leading part in the civic life of the city. When Rabbi Harry Levi stepped down in 1939, Joshua Liebman's reputation was such that he was recommended unanimously for Temple Israel's post by the most distinguished members of Hebrew Union College.

While in Chicago he came to understand that it was not enough to remind people not to worry; one must remove the roots of anxiety. Already familiar with philosophy and literature — he read voraciously in Hegel as well as Saadia, Kant as well as Maimonides — he plunged into the study of psychiatry. This he mastered by the early 1940's so as to tell the public what the professional psychiatrists had obscured in technical language. And Liebman had a passion to tell it, for he was determined that others should profit where he had suffered. He said: "No religious leader can be of help to men and women who has not himself tasted of the bitter cup of rejection, agnosticism, uncertainty."

II

Joshua Liebman wrote that *Peace of Mind* contained at least a partial "answer to the problem of evil." Although concerned with an ancient problem in theology, Liebman held fast to the humanist and Reform Jewish presupposition that the purpose of religion is not preparation for the life hereafter but "the achievement of the good life" here. Liebman was, moreover, in the tradition of Solomon Schindler in the desire to adjust Judaism to modern science. He remarked: "religion, which already has made its peace with Copernicus and Darwin, will have to make peace with Freud." The name of Temple Israel's fourth Reform rabbi was, and is today, associated with the idea that together religion and psychiatry would teach men how to attain "inner equilibrium . . . against confusion and disaster" — peace of mind.

Sigmund Freud rediscovered the evil and at once horrifying human passions that the Greek and Elizabethan tragedians had accepted as a matter of course. His rediscovery shocked the sensibilities of the Victorian and Edwardian worlds; and for at least a quarter century his influence was confined to a handful of medical doctors and Greenwich Village and Left Bank writers. By the 1930's and 1940's, however, it was clear that the "veritable hell" described by Freud existed outside the clinic. Liebman, throughout his life a meliorist, hailed

depth psychology not only as diagnosis but as therapy. For Freud, while basing his science on the gloomy assumption that man was naturally bestial, was nevertheless child of the Enlightenment in the faith that reason could make bestial man human. Herein lay, Liebman observed, the sum of what religious man had striven for: self-fulfillment through self-understanding.

And it is here that we touch on a crucial difference between Liebman and the pessimists who questioned the optimistic interpretation of man that had lain at the heart of the Enlightenment. Joshua Liebman was in the grand reforming tradition begun by Solomon Schindler. Liebman, too, thought that a cooperative economy would be superior to competitive capitalism, for in guaranteeing bread and status it would give us a less anxious and therefore "healthier human nature." However, it was first necessary to build better human beings in preparation for the better society. Equally important, the individual, irrespective of time, place, and culture, faced problems that were unrelated to the market place: "the universal human dilemmas of conscience, love, fear, grief, and God. . . ." Whereas Solomon Schindler started with the environment, Joshua Liebman began with the individual in the belief that the root of evil was in the very stuff of human nature.

The rabbi agreed unqualifiedly with Freud that every person is born with "primitive instinctual drives toward murder, incest, and cannibalism." These drives, known

as the *Id*, are in the unconscious. If uncontrolled, they lead to evil. If repressed, they also lead to evil. Conventional religion, Liebman observed, demands that one deny sensual and hostile thoughts. Denied, these thoughts guiltily bury themselves in the subconscious only to erupt in such disorders as hypertension and ulcerative colitis, asthma and masochism, the inferiority complex and suicide. Miserable, men make others miserable through anti-social acts of one sort or another.

If men once comprehended that they are not to blame for the *Id*, which is innate, then they would not retreat from themselves in guilt. And without guilt they would be secure to love others and do good. It was Liebman's belief, although not Freud's, that God had endowed man with conscience. Fortunately, innate good was stronger than innate bad. Liebman was convinced that conscience, once apprised of the existence of the *Id*, would negate its "angers, resentments, passion, lust, and envies. . . ." Man was thus not doomed to be the prisoner of his inner primitive self. Self-knowledge would lead to self-love, from which would come the implementation of the Golden Rule. The second commandment of Joshua Liebman's "commandments of a new morality" reads: "Thou shalt learn to respect thyself and then wilt thou love thy neighbor as thyself."

Men and women, Liebman continued, need outlets for their anger, aggression, and lust. The best sublimation was work, although the rabbi recommended that

one talk about and thereby cleanse one's self of anti-social ideas. In extreme cases the psychiatrist was to be consulted. Typical of the rabbi's advice was to express "*as much grief as you actually feel*" on the death of a loved one, lest repression thwart genuine need and distort personality. Also: "*we must learn how to extricate ourselves from the bondage of the physical existence and coexistence of the loved one,*" and find someone "*partially capable of replacing that relationship.*" Liebman acknowledged that long ago Jews discovered these principles and institutionalized them in *Shiva*. But men, brought up on "the superficiality of modern civilization," substituted for that ancient wisdom the false value that to hide emotion is good taste.

All this was accurate psychiatry, and it was presented in a palatable and clear way for laymen. But was it religion? And was it Judaism? Liebman's answer — and he posed the questions himself — was yes and no. At times, he noted that psychiatry was merely the "*key*" to the temple — the nature of man — but only religion could give ideals and purpose; psychiatry delineated what is and forecast what could be, while religion announced what ought to be. However, Liebman also identified the voice of psychiatry with the voice of God. He assumed that "whatever aids mankind in its quest for self-fulfillment is a new revelation of God's working in history," and concluded "that psychology's discoveries . . . are really the most recent syllables of the Divine."

Whether or not this was mere rhetoric is not clear. What is clear is that Liebman rejoiced in the way psychiatry and religion dovetailed. The purpose of the first was to make amoral man moral, while the essence of the second was simply "the accumulated spiritual wisdom and ethical precepts dating from the time of the earliest prophets and gradually formulated into a body of tested truth for man's moral guidance and spiritual at-homeness in the universe." Together psychiatrists and clergymen would teach men how and why they could and must practice tolerance and forgiveness; avoid self-pity, pride, insincerity, and cynicism; develop "the unity of man within himself"; open up the "untapped reservoirs of . . . creativity"; love and be loved. Healthy men at peace with themselves would not covet, and mature men free of nasty childhood memories would not commit adultery. Above all, religion and psychiatry would cooperate to prove the indispensability of "free will" to the grown-up, responsible, and divine-made man.

Joshua Liebman was a theist who traced disbelief to "lovelessness in early childhood, endocrine disturbances in adolescence, or a covertly hysterical fear of emotion in adulthood!" From case studies, the rabbi concluded that the atheist often denied God because, as a child, he had trusted his parents only to be let down traumatically; and when "the parental idols toppled from their pedestal, God toppled with them." Similarly, the agnostic neither believed nor disbelieved in God because

he had grown up in an "inconsistent home" of loving and friendly parents but a "stern and avenging" God.

When Liebman asked, "should not belief in God likewise be explained as the result of childhood *residues*?" he seemed to be building a trap for himself. Actually, the question was a rhetorical device to make clear the rabbi's own conception of the Divine Being. His answer to the question was "'Alas yes.'" Modern man, brought up by the stern father, believes in a "primitive, highly anthropomorphic Father dwelling in the sky. . . ." Liebman himself had believed the Deity to be like his grandfather, until he came to understand the character of a divine power who alone created order, conscience, and intelligence. Mature men in a democracy must regard God as justice-seeker and truth-seeker who has chosen man as His partner to create the good society, not as a petulant, scolding, punishing, omnipotent "feudal deity." Joshua Liebman counted on democratic America to "be brave enough to . . . create its own God idea rather than rely upon outworn tradition."

We have in Rabbi Liebman's words on immortality the final element of his humanism. He did not refute the logic of theologians who contended that God would not create the hero of Earth only to destroy him after one moment in the continuum of time. Still Liebman did not accept this logic. Rather he advised men to consider the value of death, for who would want to live eternally through endless struggle, and without the

drama of beginning, middle, and end? Awareness of death is a blessing that teaches us to clench "the fragility and nobility of the human dream," the rabbi observed. Again, in a phrase often quoted by others after his own death: "it is the knowledge that our years are limited which makes them so precious."

Temple Israel's famous rabbi was reading *Aging Successfully* when he died suddenly in 1948 of a heart attack. In death as in life Joshua Liebman was evidence of tragic irony. He accepted life on its own ironical terms — that man had vast potentialities for good but infinite capacity for evil. His name was fittingly memorialized by the founding of the Joshua Loth Liebman Chair of Human Relations at Hebrew Union College. The purpose is to combine the insights of religion and social science so as to isolate and then remove the evil that leads men to hate and fight. Shortly before his death Liebman made plans for an institute of human relations, and the title of an unfinished manuscript he had been preparing reveals what was on his mind: *Hope for Man*. Joshua Liebman remained faithful to the Reform Jewish idea that Messiah means a democratic and peaceful society for mankind.

III

Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman's death shocked a city, if not a nation, for he was more than the rabbi of a con-

gregation. He was a pastor for many and all sorts of Americans, as the uncommon popularity of his radio sermons and book demonstrate. Eight thousand persons passed by his bier, while the throng who attended funeral services at Temple Israel was so numerous that the bulk could not get into the synagogue. Governor Bradford was there, as well as a number of Protestant clergymen. And from the provisional government of Israel came a telegram of sympathy. School was let out in Boston, the Massachusetts General Court adjourned for the night memorializing Joshua Liebman's name, and memorial services were held — in churches as well as synagogues — for the deceased clergyman. As a pastor for troubled persons in a troubled world, Joshua Liebman not only healed, but served as an emissary from Jewry to Christendom.

His congregation was proud of him, and members went to him with personal problems. Shortly before his death a psychiatric social worker was appointed to aid him in counselling. However, there were many who had no such neuroses as required medical care. These were not comforted by Liebman, although they were stimulated. A writer for the *Ladies' Home Journal* asked one of the officers of Temple Israel whether Liebman gave his congregation peace of mind. The answer was: "No." "Josh stimulates us too much, makes us think."

In making people think Joshua Liebman was in the tradition begun by Solomon Schindler, who had be-

lieved in education as well as edification through the sermon. Liebman and his congregation, rejecting Schindler's idea that Jews were simply a religious group, returned to certain of the ancient folk traditions. This return reflected the need for group solidarity in a world that had witnessed the destruction of European Jewish life and the growth of American anti-Semitism. Liebman also defended the return on the grounds that the human psyche was so constituted that it needed the emotional outlet provided by religious liturgy; reason was not enough. Yet, Joshua Liebman's *Peace of Mind* embodies the hope that men will be reasonable enough to cure themselves of childish emotions so as to attain inner balance. Like Schindler, Liebman, although describing man as part animal, was a rationalist.

IV

That Jews are a people, that worship must satisfy emotional need, and that the synagogue ought to promote social justice — these are ruling ideas in Reform Jewish thought at midcentury. Like his three predecessors Abraham Klausner was ordained at Hebrew Union College. Prior to assuming the pulpit of Temple Israel in 1949, he served as a chaplain in the United States Army during World War II and thereafter as assistant to the President of his theological alma mater. When he resigned from Temple Israel in 1953 he was succeeded



Fabian Bachrach

Abraham J. Klausner



by Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn, who for seventeen years since his ordination had served at Central Synagogue of Nassau County in Rockville Centre, New York.

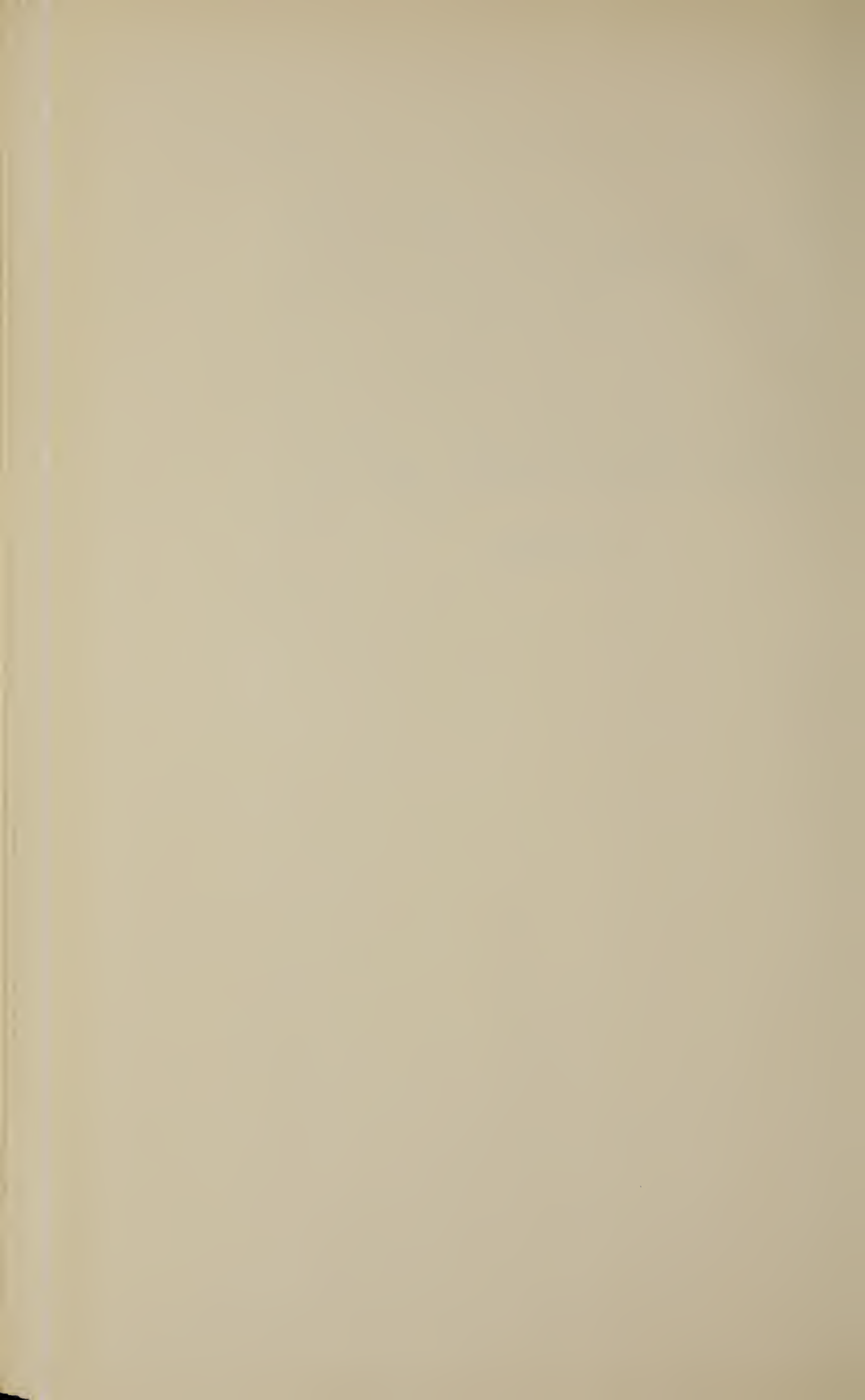
The present rabbi approves of the credo adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis that "Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body." Already he has gone beyond his predecessor in formalizing the conception that Jews are a people with a strong emotional tie to the folk past: *Shabbos* candles are lighted at services, and the rabbi wears a *tallith*-stole on his robe. For some years he has been an editor of *The Reconstructionist*, a magazine that champions the idea that Jewishness is peoplehood. Like his two predecessors, he supports the Jewish state of Israel. All of this Rabbi Gittelsohn defends on the grounds that the Reform in Reform Judaism means continuing change for the better.

Roland Gittelsohn, author of two books and man of action, is devoted to the endless task of achieving democracy. He has written: "If Judaism stands for anything, it stands for the brotherhood of men — *all* men." Vitally concerned with removing prejudice, he served in 1947 on President Harry S. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights; and sensitive to the dangers imperilling civil liberties, he has spoken out against reckless defamation of character. In 1952, the rabbi won a Freedoms Foundation award. A chaplain with the Fifth Marine Division at Iwo Jima, Rabbi Gittelsohn knows the

meaning of struggle and misery, but also of triumph. One of his books is entitled, characteristically, *Little Lower Than The Angels*. His religion, deriving from belief in God as beneficent and moral mover of the universe, is, in the words of William James, "the religion of healthy-mindedness." In fine, the present and sixth Reform rabbi of Temple Israel brings to Boston the classical Reform Jewish principle that Judaism justifies itself "by playing a vital, functioning role in achieving this-worldly salvation. . . ."

Part Three

The Rabbi Looks at the Future







Hal Harrison

Roland B. Gittelsohn

CHAPTER EIGHT

Temple Israel's Tomorrow

To turn from the past to the future is at once to attempt the most difficult and most intriguing part of this evaluation. Difficult, because not even with the most instructive insights of our history would any honest man pretend to accurate clairvoyance. Intriguing, because though we have been largely determined beyond our will by the past, we have it within our present power, in part at least, to act in determination of the future. Indeed, this is in a sense the reason for undertaking such a study as this on the occasion of Temple Israel's Centenary: that we may learn enough about the past, and apply it with sufficient intelligence in the present to influence our congregation's character in the future.

At many crucial moments our development reflected that of Reform Judaism at large. But it would be a serious and disparaging mistake to assume that Temple

Israel's role has always been a passive one. As often as we have reflected tendencies and developments initiated elsewhere, we have ourselves pioneered in such changes, and thereby have influenced in turn the larger body of congregational life in American Reform Judaism. We cannot be content to have it otherwise in the future. While we shall always be responsive to the best in the world around us, we shall also be jealous of our role as one of the truly great congregations of the country, not only in a physical sense, but also in the influence we exert on the future of congregational life in general. In a sense, therefore, we undertake more than the foolish might at first suppose when we seek to inquire into the future activity and role of Temple Israel.

I

There are three directions for the future which I myself hold very close to my mind and heart. First — and perhaps foremost — I believe the chief responsibility of our congregation is to make Judaism as a religious civilization meaningful and functional in the lives of our individual members. For better or for worse, whether we like it or not, the synagogue has outgrown some of its previous roles in American life. It is no longer an essential center for the social or communal activity of the American Jew; numerous secular and fraternal organization now fulfill that function in whole or in part.

Nor is the synagogue any longer an exclusive sponsor even of Jewish education; there is an increasing number of Jewish schools now developing under communal auspices. Nor, finally, is the synagogue as greatly needed now as it once was to provide general cultural opportunity for the community as a whole. In earlier days, a lecture or forum at Temple Israel often provoked as much excitement and attention among Christians as among ourselves. Today, even apart from the competition of television and radio, Boston has become, in the only partially facetious words of one contemporary, a community in which half the population travels about lecturing to the other half.

If the synagogue today is less indispensable than before in these respects, it is far more essential in providing a functioning religious orientation for its members. One of the strange paradoxes of our time is that, while men and women of all faiths today may be better adjusted to home and community and nation than were their fathers, they are far less adjusted to their universe. For Jews, no other agency can take the place of the synagogue in providing this larger and vastly more important kind of adjustment. Our principal purpose in the future, therefore, must be to offer our members such knowledge and reinterpretation of their traditions as will actually function in their lives. We must give them a mature acceptance of life's inevitable tragedies, and stimulate them to ethical conduct consistent with

the challenge of their ancient prophets. There may be other agencies equipped to give some kinds of Jewish education; only the synagogue can provide the proper kind of Jewish *religious* education.

This means teaching and learning and knowledge. It means that pulpit and classroom must be coordinated to make our people Jews not merely by the accident of birth, nor by coincidence or convenience or social homogeneity, but by deep conviction and faith. There was a time when Temple Israel members were proud of the fact that half or more than half the attendance at religious service consisted of Christians. While, of course, men and women of all faiths, indeed of no faith, are always welcome, it is far more important now and in the future that our attendance be calculated in terms of our own members who are regularly present. Our first task must be to help Jews find their place as such in the universe.

II

A second responsibility Temple Israel must face in its immediate future is that of bringing the insights of prophetic Judaism to bear on the making of American society. In the earliest period of colonial settlement, it was scarcely necessary for Jews to do this in person. One wishes that the average Jew today knew as much about Jewish biblical tradition as the average educated Protes-

tant knew in our nation's infancy. Those who settled New England's shores, establishing here the outlines of what soon became the United States of America, consciously followed the patterns of Jewish learning and values in many ways. Early American civilization bore the unmistakable imprint of Judaism.

Today this is no longer true. If we believe that Judaism as a religious civilization still has something positive to contribute to the making of America, then it follows inescapably that there must be individual Jews in America who will know enough about their heritage to apply it to the crises of contemporary life. Judaism has unique attitudes to express, and therefore unique contributions to make, on many problems currently of concern to all Americans: on marriage and the home, on labor and industrial relations, on the responsibilities of public servants and ordinary citizens. Entirely aside from the need for knowledge of these attitudes by Jews themselves for their own sake, it would be an unforgivable waste for America if we failed to know enough about our own Jewish past to make it a factor in the shaping of America's future.

Temple Israel was organized during the New England Renaissance, at a time when — influenced and inspired by social visionaries like Emerson and Thoreau — men were experimenting at Brook Farm and elsewhere so as to establish a just society. The need for such bold experimentation is greater by far today than

it was then. We have no record of how our congregational fathers looked upon those of their contemporaries who took religion seriously enough to apply it in their social conduct. We can, however, say with certainty that if they understood their own Judaism, they must have seen in these efforts the sentences of modernity punctuated with the accents of ancient Jewish prophecy. No less is true of us today. We cannot profess or pretend to take our Judaism seriously unless we apply it to every problem of political or economic import where ethical considerations are at stake.

Both Rabbis Schindler and Fleischer, unfortunately, believed it necessary for Jews to surrender much of their own unique heritage in order to join with Christians in bringing religion to bear as an influence on society. We know today — or ought to know — better. It is precisely in the proportion that we preserve our distinctiveness and add the particular instrumentation of prophetic Judaism to the symphony of American life that we help most to eliminate our most grievous social ills. Again, therefore, the inescapable conclusion is that our people must have knowledge of Judaism. And the congregation as such must make it both possible and desirable that they obtain such knowledge. It is my fervent hope that, in addition to general knowledge of our religious civilization, we soon have in Temple Israel a Social Action Committee whose specific charge it will be to study the problems of our time in the perspective of Jewish religious and social ideals.

III

Not even so brief a prospectus as this could be concluded without adding, as an area for Temple Israel's growth in the future, the field of interfaith relationships. It may immediately be protested that here is another instance where the synagogue no longer has an exclusive or indispensable jurisdiction. True. But the synagogue does have, now perhaps more than ever, a *unique* contribution to make to our relations with our Christian neighbors. Far too much of the effort now being exerted in this direction is excessively apologetic. It aims at inducing the Gentile to accept us because, after all, we are so much like him that it hardly pays to quarrel over the insignificant difference.

The influence of the synagogue in general — of Temple Israel in particular — must be quite in the opposite direction. It is altogether unworthy of us or our proud heritage to plead for good will by minimizing our uniqueness. Our congregation must increasingly build good will between Christians and ourselves precisely on the ground that we are different, and have, therefore, something unique to contribute to American culture. In an earlier time, Minot J. Savage thought he was paying a compliment to liberal Jews as well as liberal Christians when he wrote: "the Christian's ceasing to be a Christian, and the Jew's ceasing to be a Jew." Today this would be no compliment. Today — and tomor-

row — Temple Israel must strive for the preservation of what is unique in Judaism and for good will based on the acceptance, indeed the encouragement, of that uniqueness. While doing that, we must also seek to help our fellow Jews choose as their liaison with all general causes in the community, not those Jews who know least about Judaism and whose zeal for more general work is actually a flight from themselves, but rather those Jews who know most about Judaism and who will, therefore, have most to contribute to the community.

IV

That we propose in some respects to depart from the ways of our founders does not mean or imply criticism of them. It rather suggests we intend to compliment them by assuming that, even as they adjusted Jewish tradition to their day, so we mean, in the same spirit, to adjust it to the changed circumstances of our own.

Temple Israel's tomorrow will be one of bringing rich Jewish religious inspiration to its individual members, of insuring that Judaism will be one of the several quantities to be added to the sum total of American life, and of establishing a mutually reciprocal relationship between our neighbors and ourselves on the basis of positive acceptance rather than of apologetic denial. In facing these tasks it is important that we be an active congregation, not just an active pulpit with a group of

more or less passive followers. The health of Temple Israel, indeed of any Jewish congregation, is to be diagnosed in terms of its members as a whole not by the success of its rabbi. Let us, then, face forward to the future as a group determined that our affiliation will be neither nominal nor minimal. Let us expect — and demand — that Temple Israel will make of us, here and now, “a kingdom of priests and a people of holiness.”

Our Contributors

Oscar Handlin, author of our Foreword, is a Harvard Ph.D. and Professor of History at Harvard University. His course on American immigration attracts annually a large number of graduate students and undergraduates. He has written prolifically in the areas of American social, intellectual, and economic history. His chief works include *Boston's Immigrants: 1790-1865*; *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy*; *This Was America*; *The Uprooted*. For the last he won a Pulitzer Prize. His most recent publication is the *Harvard Guide to American History*, which, together with the Harvard American history department, he helped to compile.

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Lee M. Friedman, octogenarian member of Temple Israel, is a prominent Boston attorney who has won distinction in several fields. He is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School. He is a Trustee of the Boston Public Library. The possessor of the finest private library in America on Judaica, he has written much on the history of the Jews, and has served as President and is now Honorary President of the American Jewish Historical Society. Among his numerous publications are: *Early American Jews*; *Robert Grosseteste and the Jews*; *Zola and the Dreyfus Case*; *Rabbi Haim Isaac Carigal*; and *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots*. He contributed Chapter II to this volume.

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Roland B. Gittelsohn is a graduate of Western Reserve University and Hebrew Union College. He was Rabbi of Central Synagogue of Nassau County, Rockville Centre, from 1936-1953, when he was called to Temple Israel. He was on the Executive Board of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1949 to 1951; Chairman of its Placement Committee from 1949 to 1952; and is currently Chairman of the Commission on Justice and Peace. He served on President Harry S. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights and was a member of the Midcentury Committee for Children and Youth. He

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